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STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

BY THE

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STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

I.—THE DEVELOPMENT OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

IT is impossible to understand the Book of Revelation without some knowledge of the Jewish apocalyptic literature from which the writer drew much of the material to which he gave a distinctively Christian character. For three hundred years—from 200 B.C. to A.D. 100—Jewish religious teaching expressed itself in the form of Apocalypses. Some of these have recently been recovered, but no doubt many have perished. To understand the growth of this new literary form we must begin with the prophets. The earlier Hebrew prophets were occupied with moral teaching for the present rather than with predictions of the future. They were preachers of righteousness, and their message was that disloyalty to God would inevitably bring punishment, and that repentance and loyalty would ensure national prosperity and security.

The Book of Ezekiel

When the Jewish people were carried into exile the warnings of the older prophets seemed to be fulfilled, and in Ezekiel we can trace the beginning

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of a new tendency. His object was to encourage the faithful among the people in times of darkness and adversity. His use of symbols and imagery was probably suggested by the religious art of Babylon. As compared with the earlier prophets he is more consciously a literary artist, giving his teaching in pictures rather than in sermons. Instead of the direct assertion, "Thus saith the Lord," the prophet frequently describes the truth as revealed to him in visions, of which angels are the interpreters. Another apocalyptic feature in Ezekiel is his interest in the course of the history, not only of the chosen people, but also of the great nations with which they were now connected. In the Book of Zechariah we find the same characteristics. Then, lastly, Ezekiel regards history not as the outcome of human action, but as the working out of a divinely predestined purpose. In modern language, the future does not evolve out of the present, but is the result of a direct intervention of God. In all these ways he is preparing for the later apocalyptic period.

Jewish History after the Exile

After the restoration, Jewish national history was comparatively uneventful till Palestine came under the rule of the Greek sovereigns of the Seleucid dynasty. The greatest of these, Antiochus Epiphanes, attempted to destroy Jewish national life by striking at its religion, and the splendid struggle of the Maccabees followed. From this time onward Judaism was constantly menaced by the growing power of Rome. In these crises a series of writers made it their business to encourage the people by setting before them the promise of a golden age of triumph and prosperity, of which the dark days of

conflict and danger were the prelude. They claimed to reveal the secrets of the future, and so their works came to be known as Apocalypses (Greek *apokalupsis* =revelation). Instead of writing under their own names these writers represent the divine revelation as given to some great religious teacher (Moses, Isaiah, Enoch). These books, therefore, consist partly of history written in the form of prediction and partly of visions of the coming Kingdom of God, yet to be established, either on earth or in a new world in which God reigns as King.

The Book of Daniel

The earliest of these Apocalypses, and the only one included in the Old Testament, is the Book of Daniel, which was probably written at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes to encourage the faithful Jews (the *Chasidim* or Pious, as they were called) to be true to their religion. The book had an immense influence over Jewish thought, and kept alive in the nation the hope of deliverance from the oppression of the heathen world. The writer probably uses older Jewish stories to show the impotence of heathen despotism to destroy the man who is faithful to God. He sees the great kingdoms of the Gentile world rise and fall, like savage wild beasts, till the appointed hour when the true kingdom is set up by God Himself, and the faithful are rewarded. The kingdom is given to "a Son of Man," the representative of the "saints of the Most High."

The Book of Daniel represents God not only as the Father and Protector of the Jewish people, but also as the "Most High" who "ruleth in the kingdom of men," guiding all human history. God is represented as reigning in heaven and controlling

human affairs through the agency of angels rather than through the action of human beings. The servants of God are called to endure with faith and patience till the appointed hour of deliverance comes.

The Uncanonical Apocalypses

The Book of Daniel is probably the latest book included in the Old Testament. It was followed by a number of apocalyptic writings, of which a few survive, sometimes in a rather fragmentary condition. It is impossible to say whether the writer of the Book of Revelation knew these books (though in the case of the Book of Enoch it is almost certain that he did), but he was certainly familiar with the ideas and symbols that they use.

II.—CHARACTERISTICS OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

AS we have seen, the Book of Revelation is one of a group of writings that have certain marked characteristics. Some recognition of these s necessary to the right understanding of the Book.

The Present

Contemporary history is represented in the apocalyptic writers under the guise of prediction. Writing in times of oppression, they picture the present as a period of almost unrelieved gloom. The question in their minds is : How can this tyranny of heathen empires be reconciled with the promises of God ? And their answer is that all human history is pre-determined by God. The " weeks " of world-history must run their course, and then God will

intervene. Meanwhile the special call is for faithfulness and endurance. The chosen people have no message for the heathen world, which is foredoomed to destruction. In the Empires of Greece and Rome the powers of darkness are at war against the saints. It is from the school of the Pharisees—the patriotic party among the Jews—that these Apocalypses come. The Sadducees, who accepted Roman rule, are regarded as apostate, and are expected to share the doom of the heathen. Such problems as the meaning of creation, the origin of evil, the laws of nature are discussed by these writers. The spiritual world is a place of evil as well as of good; fallen angels are "delivered into chains of darkness" (2 St. Peter ii. 4), but their power is not yet broken.

The Future

From the darkness of the present these writers turn to the hope of the future. When the destined hour has come God will intervene, either personally or through the agency of "the man whom He has chosen"—the Messiah, who is sometimes regarded as a supernatural being, sometimes as a man raised up by God for the deliverance of His people. The Messianic Kingdom is sometimes thought of as established on earth before the final end (hence the idea of the millennium); sometimes as established in a new earth after the final judgment that closes human history. But the resurrection of the nation is not enough. After the exile Jewish religious thought is more deeply interested than before in the destiny of the individual. Will the faithful dead—especially those who have died for their religion—share in the glories of the Messianic Kingdom? The apocalyptic writers are thus led to bring into fresh

prominence the doctrine of the resurrection of the individual (Dan. xii. 2). They differ in their conception of the resurrection life, and in regard to the resurrection of the wicked.

Almost all the apocalyptic writers predict a time of tribulation just before the end (Dan. xii. 1) in which the separation of the righteous from the wicked will become complete.

Apocalyptic Symbolism

The apocalyptic writers adopt an elaborate system of symbolism. Angels play a large part in their books as rulers of nations, interpreters of visions, and agents of the purposes of God in nature. Wild animals as symbols of heathen kingdoms; the fires of Gehenna into which the wicked are cast; the heavenly bodies as symbols of spiritual realities all find their place in apocalyptic writings. Numbers have a symbolical significance. Three and its multiples (21, 30, 36) have a sacred character. Four (perhaps from the four points of the compass) has to do with this world. Seven was also a sacred number, expressing completeness (thus there are seven heavens and seven planets in the Secrets of Enoch). Ten is also used to express the idea of completeness, as in Dan. vii. 7. So the ten plagues of Egypt express the completeness of the Divine judgment (cf. Rev. ii. 10). Twelve (perhaps from the twelve months) is another number used to express a complete group or society. So the idea of the twelve gates of heaven appears in the Book of Enoch and in the Secrets of Enoch. On the other hand, six is the symbol of incompleteness—as in the six days of labour that precede the seventh day of rest (Exod. xx. 9). Five, as one-half of ten, also expresses

the idea of incompleteness, as in Rev. ix. 5; xvii. 10.

As Dr. Swete points out, the symbolism of the apocalyptic writers took the place that art took in other religions. Instead of painting pictures or carving statues they appealed to the imagination in literature. "Such ideas and symbolic forms were in the atmosphere and in the minds of men at the time, and the ideas with which he (the writer of the Book of Revelation) was familiar moulded the imagery of his visions" (Ramsay).

III.—THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

LIKE other apocalyptic writers, the author of the Book of Revelation is occupied in interpreting the history of his own time. It is now generally believed that the book belongs to the closing years of the first century. What was its historic background?

The Roman Emperors

Augustus, the founder of the Empire, ruled from B.C. 31 to A.D. 14. He was succeeded by Tiberius (14–37), and then by the cruel and half-crazy Caligula (37–41). Claudius (41–54) was a weak-minded ruler, ruled by his wives and court officials. To him succeeded Nero (54–68), perhaps the worst of all the emperors, and the first of them to persecute the new "sect" of the Christians. At length the Empire revolted, and Nero killed himself. Three emperors—Galba, Otho and Vitellius—reigned for a few months each, and then Vespasian succeeded (69–79). His son Titus, the conqueror of Jerusalem

(70), reigned for two years, and was succeeded by Domitian, a cruel and degraded ruler, who was murdered in 96. Omitting the three emperors whose reigns hardly count, Domitian was the eighth emperor (Rev. xvii. 10–11).

The Worship of the Emperor

Augustus, as a means of binding the Empire together, established the worship of the emperor and of the goddess Roma (the spirit of Rome). This new cult became fashionable in the Eastern Provinces of the Empire, and temples dedicated to Augustus and Rome were erected at Pergamum (Rev. ii. 13) and Ephesus. But there is no evidence that the new cult was enforced by law, and the Jews were apparently not obliged to adopt it, though Caligula tried to erect a statue of himself in the Temple (an attempt that may be referred to in 2 Thess. ii. 4; St. Mark xiii. 14). From St. Paul's Epistles and the First Epistle of St. Peter, written to the Churches of Asia, we gather that as yet the Roman authorities were not hostile to Christianity, which they probably regarded as merely a Jewish sect. Under Nero all this was changed. The persecution that he started in Rome naturally influenced the provincial authorities, and from this time Christianity was an unlawful religion (*religio non licita*). In the confusion that followed the fall of Nero the Christians were probably left alone, but when Domitian came to the throne the cult of the emperor was revived, and was apparently enforced by the local authorities, though not, as far as we know, by imperial edict. To refuse to offer incense to the image of the emperor was treason, punishable with death, and Christianity was threatened with extinction. The immediate

purpose of the Book of Revelation was to urge the Christians to be true to their faith in this time of trial. Rome had now become the instrument of Satan, but the victory of Christ was certain and near. As a matter of fact the policy of persecution was not consistently applied, and the Church weathered the storm. Under the more enlightened emperors of the second century a kind of unofficial toleration was extended to the Christians, and before the next general persecution the Church had grown too strong to be destroyed.

The Antichrist

Side by side with the anticipation of a Messiah or "Christ," there seems to have grown up in Jewish tradition the belief in a false Messiah who should establish himself in Jerusalem, and who would, in the end, be destroyed by the true Messiah. This idea of an Antichrist was taken over by Christian thought, and we find traces of it in St. Mark xiii. 22 ; St. John v. 43 ; 2 Thess. ii. 3–12 ; 1 St. John ii. 18 ; 2 St. John, verse 7. After the fall of Nero a superstition grew up, especially in the Eastern Provinces, that he was not dead, but had fled to the East and would return at the head of a Parthian army. Later, this legend took another form, and conceived of him as returning from the dead as a demon-ruler to establish a satanic kingdom. Perhaps the writer of the Book of Revelation saw in the persecutor Domitian a reincarnation of Nero. It would appear from 2 Thess. ii. 7 that the Roman Empire was regarded as the obstacle to the manifestation of Antichrist, and the early Christians were urged to pray for the Empire on this ground. But the writer of the Book of Revelation, living at a time when the

Empire had declared war on Christianity, sees in the emperor, or in his successor, the Antichrist whose advent had been expected, and whose coming was the sign that it was the last time (1 St. John ii. 18). The condition of the Empire during the closing decade of the first century seemed to portend its approaching dissolution. Few observers could have foreseen that it would last for nearly four centuries in the west and for more than thirteen in the east.

IV.—PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

THE Book of Revelation is a Christian Apocalypse —that is, it is an attempt to forthtell, in apocalyptic form, the revelation of Jesus Christ. Its primary purpose is not to predict, but to interpret.

The Purpose of the Writer

Like the Hebrew prophets, the author of this book is thinking most of the present needs of those for whom he writes. But in interpreting the spiritual significance of his own age he is providing the Church with a key to unlock the secret of every age. For the spiritual realities behind all ages of history are the same. The struggle between the Church and the world has lasted far longer than he apparently expected, and the end is not yet, but the messages of encouragement and warning that he was inspired to give to his own generation are needed still. There are three special truths that the book is designed to teach: (1) That God is working His purpose out in all history, even in the darkest times of perplexity and evil. World-empires may defy Him, but their apparent triumph is only the prelude to disaster (Psalm ii. 1–4). (2) The goal of human history is

the victory of Christ—a victory won, not by the gradual improvement of human society, but by the intervention of God. The forces of evil resist to the end, but the power of Christ is stronger. (3) The Church must never compromise with evil or purchase the favour of the world by disloyalty to her Master. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The Christian man has no right to expect immunity from suffering, but "the Lord knoweth them that are His," and they are safe in His keeping.

The Drama of History

Throughout the book human history is regarded from the standpoint of the eternal world. We are invited to stand outside the time-order in the timeless world where God reigns, and to see all history as an age-long contest between spiritual forces, of which the earth is the battle-ground. Human history is unintelligible unless we learn to recognise the spiritual background of it all. What God cares for is the moral welfare of humanity, not its material prosperity. The New Jerusalem is more splendid than the apostate Babylon, but its splendour is only the framework of its moral worth. Whatever has not moral value must perish. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof." This is the Christian interpretation of history. We must not allow ourselves to be dazzled by the pomp and glamour of the world; we must ask ourselves always whether its triumphs and conquests are serving a spiritual purpose. There is a "will to evil" at work in human history as well as a "will to good," and often the will to evil seems stronger. But God will triumph in the end.

Symbolism and Order

The writer gives his message in a series of pictures, which his earliest readers, accustomed to apocalyptic symbolism, would be able to interpret for themselves. More direct statements would hardly have been possible in a book that might fall into the hands of the Roman authorities. (St. Peter probably uses Babylon for Rome in his First Epistle for the same reason.) Many of the symbols used by the writer are derived from the Old Testament; others are original. We must not expect to find symbolical meaning in every detail of the images he uses. "Much of the imagery of the Apocalypse is doubtless not symbolism, but merely designed to heighten the colouring of the great picture" (Swete).

There is a certain order running through the book, but it is not chronological. The visions of judgment overlap one another and are to be regarded not as a series of events, but as a series of pictures in which the divine judgment is seen at work in different departments of human life. The indications of time (five months, forty-two months, ten days, a thousand years) are not to be taken literally; they belong to the symbolism of the book. No attempt is made to foretell the length of the Christian dispensation; the history of the world is seen foreshortened, as it would seem to Him with whom a thousand years are as one day. All that the writer knows is that the contest between the Church and the world will go on, and, as he thinks, grow more intense as the end draws near.

V.—THE PRELUDE

(i. 1–3)

IN many ways the Book of Revelation is specially suited to the needs of our time. We have passed into an apocalyptic age—an age in which God has brought His judgments upon all the earth. We may hope to learn something from the writer of this book as to the meaning of the events that are happening, and our attitude towards them.

The teaching of the book is expressed in symbols and images that make it difficult for us to understand it, but those for whom it was first written were familiar with the earlier apocalyptic literature from which these symbols and images came. The best preparation for the study of the Book of Revelation is to read the Books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and the later Jewish Apocalypses that are now published in English translations. But our main purpose in these studies is not critical, but devotional.

The prelude deals with the source, the channel, and the purpose of revelation.

The Source of Revelation

The Greek word for revelation—apocalypse—means, literally, unveiling; so it comes to mean the thing that is unveiled. In this book the thing unveiled is the spiritual significance of the drama of human history. All revelation begins with God; we can learn only what He teaches. And all revelation is given through Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man. Because He is God, He receives of the Father (St. John viii. 26; xii. 49), because He is man, He reveals it unto us. For the

Incarnation does not mean only that "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us"—the message of Christmas; but also that the human was taken up into the Eternal—the message of Ascension Day. And the revelation that "God gave unto Him" He shares with his servants who are now His friends and learn His secrets (St. John xv. 15).

The writer undoubtedly shared the belief of the early Church that the climax and close of world-history was near. The apocalyptic writers saw human history foreshortened, as mountains many miles away sometimes look near. In a sense they were mistaken—as Jesus Christ warned His disciples, "The end is not yet." But in a deeper sense the whole course of Christian history is only "a little while" when measured by the standard of eternity (2 St. Peter iii. 8).

The Channel of Revelation

God speaks to men through men. Early Christian tradition identified the John here with the apostle, but it is worth noting that the writer nowhere makes that claim. What he does claim is that he is a true witness. It is not the business of a witness to report his own opinions and theories; he is to say what he has seen. The apostles were chosen to be witnesses (St. Luke xxiv. 48); and every Christian man is a witness of "the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." On the faithfulness of our witness He depends for making known His revelation. It is the testimony of personal experience that the world wants. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." God does not send His angels now to reveal His truth to

men ; He expects us to tell each other when He has shown us (Acts i. 8 ; 1 St. John i. 3).

The Purpose of Revelation

The revelation of God is not given to satisfy human curiosity, it has a moral purpose. In early times the writings of apostolic men were read in the Christian gatherings (Col. iv. 16), so the writer says, " The man who reads this book to the Church, and the people who hear it, are blessed, if they carry out what they hear " (cp. St. Luke xi. 28). " The time is at hand "—life is too short to spend in mere listening ; we must translate truth into action, or we shall incur the judgment of those who hear the word and do it not (St. Matt. vii. 26). The writer believed that dark and troublous times were coming, in which faith would be put to the test. He believed that readers of his book would find there the secret of strength and courage, for they would see how through all the confusion and contest, God was working out His purposes of good (St. John xiv. 29). The book of the New Testament, with which the book of Revelation has most in common, is the Epistle to the Hebrews. In both, Christ in heaven is the champion of His people on earth ; in both, the Church endures by faith ; in both, the Old Testament age passes into the New as successive stages of one revelation ; in both, the vision of the true City of God crowns endurance with victory.

VI.—INTRODUCTORY SALUTATION

(i. 4–8)

THE whole Book is an epistle to the Churches of the Roman Province of Asia (cp. 1 St. Peter i. 1), so the writer begins with the usual

introductory salutation. The greeting falls into three sections.

Grace for the Present

Grace and Peace are the Greek and Hebrew ideals of the supreme good. Perhaps we might say that grace is the power to act rightly, peace the power to feel rightly—doing and being. Here the twofold gift is the gift of the triune God. It is, first, from God in His Eternal Being (before all time, in all time, beyond all time). God's gifts are as eternal as God Himself. Then it is from "the seven spirits before His throne" (see ch. iv. 5). Seven is the number that expresses completeness, so the "seven spirits" represent the Holy Spirit in the fulness of His activity (cp. the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit in the Confirmation prayer). In the activity of the Holy Spirit the whole Being of God goes out to meet every kind of human need. Then it is from Jesus Christ (the only time that the writer uses this double name). Notice the threefold title that follows. He is the giver of all truth, the "faithful witness"; the giver of all life, the "first-born from the dead" (Col. i. 18); the giver of all power, "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (St. Matt. xxviii. 18). All revelation that is not from Him is false (1 St. John iv. 2); all life that is not from Him is death (1 St. John v. 12); all power that is not from Him is usurpation (1 Cor. xv. 25).

Gratitude for the Past

The sacred name awakens gratitude:

> "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
> In a believer's ear!"

First, He loved us (or, perhaps, "loves"; the

reading is uncertain). Then He set us free from the bondage of sin at the cost of His own blood (the original is almost certainly "loosed," not "washed"). Then He organised us into a kingdom (Exod. xix. 6). "The Apocalypse is largely a protest against the Cæsar cult and the attitude of the Empire towards the Church, and at the outset it places the Divine Kingdom in sharp contrast to the imperial power" (Swete). But the Christian Church is not only a kingdom, it is a kingdom of priests—a sacerdotal society. The remedy for a false sacerdotalism is the recognition that we all share the priestly office, though certain men are divinely set apart for its public exercise. Rightly understood, every intercessory prayer is a priestly act. Like the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. vii. 1), the Book of Revelation is the epic of the Priest-King. We are subjects in His Kingdom; we are colleagues in His priesthood. With "God and Father," cp. St. John xx. 17; 1 St. Peter i. 3. In the closing doxology glory is the special characteristic of the office of priest (Exod. xxviii. 2); dominion, of the office of king.

Guidance for the Future

In verse 7 the writer has combined Dan. vii. 13 with Zech. xii. 10. As yet the world's true King was unrecognised, except by a little company, but the manifestation of the King would come in the end (St. Matt. xxiv. 30; xxvi. 64). Those who rejected Him would discover their mistake. Is the "mourning" here the sorrow of repentance or the sorrow of despair? In "even so, amen," the writer unites the Greek and Hebrew words of affirmation, as the Greek and Hebrew names are united in "Abba, Father."

The introduction closes with a solemn statement, given on the express authority of God Himself. God is the beginning and the end of the great alphabet of human history. From Him it originates (Gen. i. 1); to Him it returns at the last (1 Cor. xv. 24). Time is an interlude in eternity, creation a chapter in the life of God. The course of human history may seem baffling and inexplicable, but God is the end to which it moves. So the last word of the introduction is "All-ruling"—not merely Almighty, because omnipotence might be merely terrifying. Many of the readers of the Book could remember the wild outrages of Caligula and Nero, but when we speak of God as Almighty we do not mean that God is an arbitrary despot (as later Calvinism seemed to teach), but that God is the ideal of perfect justice and perfect order. Disorder and injustice cannot last, because the strongest force of the universe is against them.

The writer is going to carry his readers through scenes of contest and judgment, so he begins by reminding them that behind all the confusion and violence God still rules. The course of this world is still ordered by His governance; if once we forget this, all history appears a meaningless chaos.

VII.—THE VISION OF THE PRIEST-KING

(i. 9–20)

BEFORE the great drama begins, the Divine Author appears to authenticate the revelation and to provide the key to all that follows. Before the battle is joined, the victor is manifested, "alive for evermore, having the keys of Death and of Hades."

The Seer

The writer has little to say about himself, but what he says is significant. The Christian society is one family and one fellowship, in the threefold bond of what it endures (St. John xvi. 33) ; what it hopes for (1 St. Peter i. 4) ; and what it displays (St. Luke xxi. 19)—fellow-sufferers, fellow-subjects, fellow-saints (Rev. xiii. 10). Then he tells us (1) the place of the vision—in Patmos, an island in the Ægean, to which he had been banished (probably in the Domitian persecution) ; (2) the conditions of the vision—the whole vision belongs to the spiritual order, like St. Paul's (2 Cor. xii. 2 ; cp. Ezek. ii. 2). In interpreting the book, it is essential to remember this ; we are dealing, not with the facts of history, but with their spiritual significance when seen, so to speak, from above ; (3) the time of the vision. There is little doubt that "the Lord's Day" means Sunday (*Dies Dominica*), not the day of final judgment. Cut off from the fellowship of the Christian society, the writer is called into a new fellowship—a Eucharist of judgment and victory.

The voice like a trumpet recalls the revelation on Sinai (Heb. xii. 19).

The Vision

The verses that follow are founded on Dan. vii. 9, 13 ; x. 5, 6. In the Tabernacle there was a seven-branched lampstand, but here there are seven separate lampstands, grouped around a central figure, a "Son of Man" (cp. Dan. vii. 13), who is revealed by their light. But why lampstands, instead of lamps ? Is it not because the Church only holds the light ? The seven lamps are not the Churches,

but the "seven spirits of God" (see verse 4). The Church has no light of her own; she is only the lampstand on which burns the light of the Spirit of God.

The Divine Figure revealed by the light is clothed in the high-priestly garment, and girt with a royal girdle. His appearance is described in seven symbols. Like the Ancient of Days in Dan. vii. 9, He has the snow-white hair of timeless age (St. John viii. 58); His eyes shine with piercing insight (Heb. iv. 13); His feet glow like brass fresh from the furnace, telling of the fiery purity of God (Heb. xii. 29); His voice is majestic, like the sound of great waves breaking on the shore (Ezek. xliii. 2); He holds the Churches in the safe keeping of His right hand; His words are like swords of judgment (Heb. iv. 12; Eph. vi. 17); His countenance shines, as on the Mount of Transfiguration (St. Matt. xvii. 2) with dazzling splendour. It is Christ, the awful Judge of the Nations, before whom the seer falls prostrate.

The Revelation

The first word of the Divine Judge to His servant is, as of old, "Fear not." Then follows a fourfold demand. (1) A demand for recognition—"I am the Living One Who was dead"—the Christ of the Resurrection, dwelling now in eternal life—"this same Jesus," Who is at once the Saviour and the Judge of men. (2) A demand for confidence. "I have the keys of Death and of Hades" (cp. Psalm ix. 13; Isa. xxxviii. 10). Death and Hades are gates through which God's children pass to the eternal life beyond; not states in which they abide. (3) A demand for faithfulness. The writer is to put

on record all that has been or shall be revealed to him. St. Paul's vision was for himself alone (cp. Rev. x. 4); but here the seer is to tell all that he sees (Isa. vi. 9). "Thus saith the Lord" is the keyword of all the prophets. Their office is not to persuade, but to reveal. (4) A demand for understanding. All the symbols of the book are not explained, but a key to their interpretation is given at the outset. Who are the "Angels of the seven Churches"? Some think the bishops of the Churches; others the guardian angels of the Churches (as nations, in Daniel, have their guardian angels, see Dan. x. 13; xii. 1); others the "symbol of the active life of the Church." Perhaps what is meant is that in its inner life every Church is a star in the right hand of Christ (cp. Dan. xii. 3); in its outer life every Church is a messenger (angelos) of Christ. It is only the Churches "militant here on earth" that may be "removed" (see ch. ii. 5); the Church in heaven is safe in His right hand.

VIII.—THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS

(ii. 1–7)

THE messages to the seven Churches are all in the same form, consisting of (1) a short description of the speaker, (2) a commendation (where commendation is possible), (3) a warning, (4) a promise to those who overcome.

The Speaker

Ephesus was the chief city of the Province of Asia, and the Church in Ephesus was the senior Church of the group. It is probably for this reason

that the Divine Speaker is described here in His relation to all the Churches. As an eternal reality in the spiritual world, the whole Church is a cluster of stars in the right hand of Christ; as a human organisation in the world of men it is a group of lampstands in the midst of which He walks. He is *actively alive* in His Church, judging and ruling.

The Commendation

Criticism is much more effective if it is eager to commend the good before it condemns the evil. There was much to commend in the Ephesian Church. Here the commendation is threefold. But first comes the reminder that Christ knows (as One possessing perfect insight, in contrast with the knowledge derived from experience) what His Churches are doing. "I know thy works."

The Church in Ephesus is commended (1) for its labours. The same word appears at the end of the next verse—"thou hast laboured unwearyingly"; (2) for its perseverance (also twice mentioned). "Patience" means more than the negative virtue of not resenting wrong; it is the active virtue of continuing in well-doing in spite of all discouragement; (3) for what it bears and refuses to bear. It bears suffering, but will not bear evil. Verse 6 explains the special form of evil against which the Church had to contend. Of the Nicolaitans we hear again in verse 15. They seem to have been a party in the Church that turned Christian liberty into licence (St. Jude, ver. 4). Notice that the Church is not commended for hating the Nicolaitans, but for hating their *works*. To hate the evil in men is not the same thing as hating men for being evil. Christ hated evil because He loved

men, and longed to deliver them. The Church was right not to "bear evil men," that is, to tolerate them as teachers in the Church. The Christian Church must not accept every plausible teacher who professes to speak with authority; she must bring their message to the test (1 St. John iv. 1; 2 Cor. xi. 13). What is morally wrong cannot be theologically right.

The Warning

So much to commend—energy, perseverance, zeal for the truth—and yet the very existence of the Church is in danger. Why? "Thou didst leave thy first love." (St. Matt. xxiv. 12.) A Church may be efficient, active, zealous, yet if its heart is growing dead it will perish. When we discuss the causes of the comparative failure of the Church in modern life do we not often make the mistake of asking for more zeal and effort, when our real need is more love—to Christ, first of all, and then to one another? God's complaint, through the prophets, against His people was that they had allowed their love to grow cold (Jer. xi. 2; Ezek. xvi. 8 ff.). So the command to the Ephesian Church is to realise its failure—not to shut its eyes to its fall—and to turn again. It is forgetfulness that leads us so often to go on ungrateful and cold-hearted. So our Eucharist is a feast of remembrance. Notice the three stages—remember, repent, do (St. Luke xv. 17–20).

The Promise

The last note of these messages to the Churches is never one of despondency, but of victory. Even if the Church of Ephesus, as an organised body,

should perish, those within it who endure to the end shall not go unrewarded. Here the special promise goes back to Genesis ii. Paradise is a Persian word for a garden. When man was conquered by sin he was cut off from the tree of life and cast out of the Paradise of God; so when, by God's grace, he conquers sin, he is restored to all that he had lost (cp. ch. xxii. 14). The good for which man was created is reached at last—not here, but in the world of reality that lies beyond the battle-ground of human life. Hardship, danger, suffering—all these belong to our life, and there can be no victory without conflict. Our prayer should be, not "Deliver us from the struggle," but "Give us strength to overcome" (ch. xii. 11; St. John xvi. 33).

IX.—THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA

(ii. 8–11)

THE message to Smyrna is the shortest of the seven. It is wholly a message of consolation and encouragement. Of the seven cities Smyrna alone has survived, and is still an important commercial centre, largely Greek in population.

The Speaker

To a Church passing through danger and suffering the Divine Speaker is presented as the conqueror of death, the author and finisher of human history (cp. Heb. xii. 2). Even so St. Stephen, the first martyr, saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God alive and victorious, and endured, like Moses, as seeing Him who is invisible (Heb. xi. 27). The Church in Smyrna was reminded that for the

followers of Christ, as for their Master, death is the gateway of life.

The Commendation

Already the Church in Smyrna was enduring much. In place of comfort, wealth, and the good opinion of men, the Christians had to face persecution, poverty, and slander (1 St. Peter ii. 12). Notice the contrast between the Church that was rich in its apparent poverty (St. James ii. 5 ; 1 Tim. vi. 18) and the Church that was poor in its apparent wealth (ch. iii. 17). It has been suggested that the Church in Smyrna had been plundered of its possessions through the influence of its Jewish enemies (cp. Heb. x. 34). But its real wealth was beyond the reach of hostile hands (St. Matt. vi. 20). The Jews in the commercial cities of the Empire were often the bitterest opponents of Christianity (Acts xiii. 45 ; xviii. 12). By their hatred for the Gospel they showed that they had forfeited their right to be the true people of God (Rom. ii. 28 ; Gal. vi. 15), and had allied themselves with the powers of darkness (ch. iii. 9).

The Warning

The dangers that lay before the Church in Smyrna were not from within, as in most of the other Churches, but from without. Like the Hebrew Church (Heb. xii. 4) it had not yet "resisted unto blood." But popular hostility was about to be followed by official action. Bonds and afflictions (Acts xx. 23), and even death, would be the portion of the faithful. Their faith would be put to the test (1 St. Peter i. 7) for ten days.

Why "ten days"? Many answers have been

suggested. Perhaps the writer is thinking of Dan. i. 12—ten days being long enough to put endurance to the test, but not so long as to seem interminable. The crown of life promised here (cp. St. James i. 12) is not the diadem or royal crown, but the *stephanos*, or garland of victory (1 Cor. ix. 25) and of gladness. Notice the seven crowns—the crown of pride (Isa. xxviii. 1), the crown of thorns (St. John xix. 5), the crown of glory (1 St. Peter v. 4), the crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. ii. 19), the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. iv. 8), the crown of life, and the incorruptible crown (1 Cor. ix. 25). Life is itself the crown that is promised here—the victorious life that has conquered death. To the sorrowful He promised gladness; to the weary rest; to the dying life.

The Promise

The idea of victorious life is still the dominant thought. "The second death" appears to have been a phrase current in Jewish circles, and it is adopted by the writer to express the idea of the separation from God which constitutes final death (ch. xx. 6; xxi. 8). "He who is born twice," it has been said, "dies only once; he who has been born once dies twice." The first death is the death of the body, in which all alike must share; the second death is the death of the soul, which cannot touch those who are in Christ. The negative is very emphatic; he that overcometh is far beyond the power of death. It is interesting and significant to notice that the two Churches—Smyrna and Philadelphia—whose inner life is commended without qualification, are the two Churches that are warned to expect persecution. When the devil

cannot poison the Church from within, he assails it from without. A Church that is faithful in its witness has no right to expect the favour and friendship of the world (St. John xvi. 33). The victories of the Church are won through suffering; her way is the way of the cross. The temptation to compromise—to wear the garland (*stephanos*) at the heathen festivals—was hard to resist in those early days of Christianity. But he who purchased immunity from suffering by wearing the garland of shame sold his right to the garland of life that Christ Himself held out as the reward to the faithful servant who endured to the end.

X.—THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM

(ii. 12–17)

PERGAMUM was a city of temples—"by far the most illustrious in Asia" (Pliny)—and a centre of the new cult of emperor-worship that the writer of the Book of Revelation regards as the chief enemy of Christianity—hence "where Satan's throne is."

The Speaker

In the two previous letters the Divine Speaker is presented as the defender of the Churches and the victor over death; but here a sterner element enters into the picture. The sharp, two-edged sword is ready to fall in judgment on the unrepentant. In the later Middle Ages the thought of Jesus Christ as the Judge of men almost banished the thought of His work as Saviour. Perhaps we have gone too far in the opposite direction and forgotten the element of sternness in the divine

love that makes it like a sharp sword. Would it be too fanciful to suggest that the sword is "two-edged" because it served a twofold purpose—it defends the Church from foes without and it smites down foes within (verse 16)?

The Commendation

The Church in Pergamum had been faithful in persecution, especially on a particular occasion (probably in the Domitian persecution), when one leading member of the Church had suffered martyrdom. Notice how our Lord is represented as giving to Antipas His own title of "faithful witness" (see i. 5), while claiming him twice as His—"My witness; My faithful one." "The Lord knoweth them that are His"; to the little Church in a great heathen city it was an encouragement to know that the names of her martyrs were remembered in heaven.

The Warning

The Church had faced attacks from without with courage, but had shown a weak tolerance to laxity within. The whole Church was responsible for evil that it condoned. The special evil here is explained by the reference to Balaam (Num. xxxi. 16; Jude 11), who, when open attack on Israel proved ineffective, showed Balak how to entrap them into immorality and idolatry. So there was a party in the Church that resented the strictness of Christian isolation from the social life of the time, permeated as it was with heathen influences. St. Paul's teaching about things sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. viii.) was probably used to justify a laxer view of Christian duty (2 St. Peter

iii. 16). See St. Paul's warning in 1 Cor. x. 7–8. It is very difficult for us to understand how extraordinarily hard it was for these early Christians to avoid the contamination of the heathen world to which they had belonged. The Nicolaitans may have differed from "them that hold the doctrine of Balaam" in finding a philosophical justification for indulgence, as some of the gnostics did, in contempt for the body, which they regarded as "the prison of the soul." It was teaching of this kind that led the Church to add to its creed, "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

The Promise

The reference here is, of course, to the manna that was laid up before God in the ark (Exod. xvi. 33). According to a Jewish tradition, the ark was hidden by Jeremiah, to be rediscovered when Messiah came. "At that time" (the Messianic advent) "the treasury of manna will again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those days" (Baruch xxix. 8). The reference here is to the "true bread from heaven" of which our Lord speaks in St. John vi. 32. After the warning against heathen feasts comes the promise that the victor will be nourished with better food and called to a nobler banquet. Of that nobler feast (St. Luke xxii. 30) the Eucharist was the foretaste, and the fellowship of the Christian feast was to take the place of the fellowship of heathen idol banquets (1 Cor. x. 21). They could not share in both.

What does the "white stone" mean? Many explanations have been suggested, none of them entirely satisfactory. Perhaps the best is that the writer is thinking of the *tessara*, or stone ticket, that

entitled the victor in the games to food at the public expense. So the stone is white, because the heavenly banquet is for the pure in heart; and it is inscribed with a new name that is known only to the owner, because only he who is born from above can enter into the Kingdom (St. John iii. 3). The new name given to converts at their baptism expressed that idea of the new life into which they had been born. And the new life is each soul's own secret (1 St. John iii. 2). Some commentators have thought that the name written was the name of God or of the Holy Trinity. Perhaps both interpretations are true, for the true self in every Christian is, "Not I, but Christ, that liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20).

XI.—THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA

(ii. 18–29)

THYATIRA was a busy little commercial city on the borders of Lydia. From the absence of any reference to sufferings or external dangers, we may conjecture that the Church there was too obscure to attract the attention of the public authorities. Its dangers were wholly from within.

The Speaker

This is the only occasion in the Book on which the title "Son of God" is applied to our Lord. Here it gives solemnity to the warning implied in the description that follows. The eyes like a flame of fire can pierce through all disguises and concealments; the feet like glowing brass can tread down evil things. To none of the other Churches is the Divine Speaker presented in so stern an aspect.

This is not because the Church in Thyatira was specially evil, but because good and evil were both conspicuous in its life, and it must choose between them.

The Commendation

This is particularly warm and full. Love and faith were present, and as love showed itself in service (*diakonia*), so faith showed itself in endurance. *Diakonia* is the practical service that grows out of fellowship (Rom. xv. 25; Heb. vi. 10). And the Church had not only showed these graces, it had grown in grace; its Christian activities had increased, unlike the Ephesian Church that had forgotten its first love. Surely a Church of which all this could be said had no need to fear the verdict of the Master!

The Warning

What was the evil against which the Church is warned so sternly? It is difficult to say whether "the woman Jezebel" refers to an actual woman who was leading some in the Church astray by false teaching, or whether, as seems more probable, the writer means, "You have the same evil influences at work among you as those that Jezebel introduced into the kingdom of Ahab." Fornication is used throughout this Book, as in the prophets, as a name for disloyalty to God. But the compromise with the heathen world into which these Christians were being led involved actual impurity of life as well as fellowship with idol feasts. Love and faith, service and endurance—and then this evil thing growing up in the midst of the Church! The evil had been going on for some time, and now the section of

the Church that had followed the false teaching received its last warning. The doom threatened recalls the fate of the House of Ahab (2 Kings x. 7) and of Jezebel herself, cast out to make her bed in the street and be trodden underfoot. But the faithful in Thyatira are not to be involved in the doom of the unfaithful (vii. 3). The gnostics claimed that they knew deeper truths than the ordinary Christian, so here the followers of "Jezebel" made the same claim—but their "deep things" were the deep things of Satan, not of God. The faithful in Thyatira were not asked to do more than to keep the "burden" already laid on them (see Acts xv. 28). "Howbeit, hold fast what ye have, till I come."

The Promise

Here the nature of the "overcoming" is explained. To hold the fort "till Christ in the end relieve our guard" is quite as real a victory as the capture of the stronghold of the enemy. The promise here is twofold—a fellowship in the authority of Christ and a fellowship in the nature of Christ. With the promise of authority over the nations, cp. St. Matt. xix. 28; St. Luke xix. 17. The words that follow are from Psalm ii. 9. The early Christian saw the heathen world menacing and apparently unconquerable; strength to endure seemed all that they could hope for; but here they are reminded that the relation will be reversed (Dan. vii. 18); and the promise of the *Magnificat* fulfilled (St. Luke i. 52). In other words, in the kingdoms of earth force rules; in the Kingdom of God, holiness (St. Matt. v. 19). The Roman Empire tried to rule the Church with a rod of iron, and break

it in pieces like a potter's vessel. But the Empire itself was broken and the Church remained.

But what is the second gift—the morning star? Surely Christ Himself (see xxii. 16; cp. 2 St. Peter i. 19). As the angels of the Churches are stars in the right hand of Christ, so Christ Himself is a star in the right hand of each faithful servant. For as the morning star is God's gift to usher in the day, so Christ becomes identified with the personal self of each man as he stands at the threshold of the eternal day of God. The reward of endurance is to become partaker of the Divine nature (2 St. Peter i. 4).

XII.—THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS

(iii. 1–6)

SARDIS had played a great part in ancient history, but was now "beyond any other of the prominent cities of Asia, a town of the past, retaining the name of greatness, but decayed from its former estate" (Ramsay). The writer seems to have intended to bring out the parallel between the Church and the city—both were living on the memory of their past, while their real life was declining. We know nothing of the Church in Sardis except what is told us in this letter.

The Speaker

Our Lord is represented as "having," that is, controlling, both the Holy Spirit, in His manifold activity, and the Churches in their spiritual aspect (ch. i. 20). The Church in Sardis, whose life is flickering out, is reminded that the Spirit that gives life to the Churches, and the Church itself

as a spiritual society, are in His keeping. It is significant that the two Churches that are in danger of losing their place in the company of Churches are reminded that the whole Church is safe in the hand of Jesus Christ (cp. ch. ii. 1). Churches may perish, but the Church is still complete in the mind and purpose of God.

The Warning

Here there is no commendation. The opening words may mean that the Church in Sardis was conspicuous for apparently vigorous life—it "had a name" for energy and vitality. But its true spiritual life was flickering out. There are Churches still that seem "alive" with vigorous organisation and conspicuous activity; yet God knows that they are dead. The first charge to the Church in Sardis is to watch. Professor Ramsay suggests a reference to the fact that twice in its history the acropolis of Sardis was captured by enemies owing to lack of watchfulness. With this call to watchfulness compare Rom. xiii. 11–14. The next charge is to establish the good that still remained in the Church, to fan into a flame the dying embers of life, for "I have found no work of thine complete in the sight of my God." There lay the failure of the Church—it had never carried through its "works," never done its best. And as the offering of our best is the secret of life, so the offering of less than our best is the way of death. Then comes a threefold charge—to remember, to retain, to return. The Church is charged to remember the way in which it first received the Gospel, to revive the memory of its "first love" (cp. Gal. iii. 1), then to keep the truth it learnt in those early days, and

then to turn back from evil things and begin again (St. Matt. xviii. 3). Every act of repentance is a kind of rebirth, a new beginning. The warning that follows is an echo of the words of Jesus Christ (St. Mark xiii. 35; St. Luke xii. 39). The penalty of unwatchfulness is unreadiness for the Master's coming (St. Matt. xxiv. 50).

The Promise

In Thyatira there was a "remnant" that had not been led astray; here it is only "a few names"; yet He knows them. They have kept their robes unspotted by the world (St. James i. 27); and so with white robes (St. Mark ix. 3) they shall walk with Him, as His disciples walked with Him in the days of His flesh; or, perhaps, as Enoch walked with God (Gen. v. 22). Their reward is to enjoy the realisation of what they aspired to be. Then, in more general forms, follows the promise to him that overcometh. It is a threefold promise—because he strove against impurity, he shall be clothed in white raiment; because he strove against death, he shall be recorded in the book of life; because he confessed the name of Christ, he shall be acknowledged before God and the angels (St. Matt. x. 32; St. Luke xii. 8). White robes are the symbol of festivity (Eccl. ix. 8) and purity (ch. vii. 9; xix. 8). Is there a reference here to the resurrection of the body (2 Cor. v. 2)? "The Book of life" represents an idea that runs all through the Bible (Exod. xxxii. 32; Dan. xii. 1; Malachi iii. 16; St. Luke x. 20; Phil. iv. 3). The writer may be thinking here of the civic register, from which the name of a citizen would be removed on his death. The Book of life is the divine memory (2 Tim. ii. 19); to pass out

of the divine remembrance is to be lost. Though the words are given in the negative form, as a promise, they would have little meaning unless they implied the possibility that other names might be blotted out; that deliberate unfaithfulness—the lack of the wedding garment—might mean outer darkness (St. Matt. xxii. 12).

XIII.—THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA

(iii. 7–13)

BETWEEN the two stern letters to the Churches of Sardis and Laodicea comes this beautiful message to Philadelphia, as though the Divine Speaker welcomed the opportunity of laying aside the sword of judgment and giving His love full scope. The Church in Philadelphia survived the Ottoman invasions, and the town has still a bishop and about one thousand Christian inhabitants (Swete).

The Speaker

The description is from Isa. xxii. 22. The key expresses the idea of authority lawfully exercised (cp. ch. i. 18). So Christ is represented as the ideal of perfect holiness, truth, and power. He is not here the Judge, but the Defender of His Church.

The Commendation

The Church in Philadelphia was not influential or rich or powerful (cp. 1 Cor. i. 26). Yet it had kept the word and confessed the Name of Jesus Christ. The word is defined in verse 10 as "the word of My patience." For what the word of His patience means see 1 St. Peter ii. 21; Heb. xii. 1. It would seem that

here, as in Smyrna (ch. ii. 9), the chief enemies of the Gospel were the Jews, whom facilities for trade had brought to the town. Perhaps, as in Galatia, they had tried to win over the Gentile Christians to the need of circumcision and obedience to the Jewish law. St. Ignatius' letter to the Philadelphian Church seems to suggest that this, rather than open opposition, was the special danger. But these false Jews should be compelled to bow in submission before the true Israel, as the prophets had predicted that the Gentile world should do (Isa. xlv. 14; xlix. 23). "I have loved thee" is probably a quotation from Isa. xliii. 4. The love of Christ for His Church is an eternal fact; its manifestation is complete when "the marriage of the Lamb" (ch. xix. 7) crowns the long story of her waiting. But what is the meaning of the parenthetical sentence? The open door that no man can shut carries on the thought of the key. Perhaps the writer is thinking of Isa. xlv. 1–2 (cp. Col. iv. 3). The door here is the door of opportunity. "The open door doubtless refers to the position of Philadelphia on the threshold of the eastern country and to the rapidity with which the new religion was spreading to the plateau through the cities connected with it" (Ramsay). This section closes with a promise, an assurance, and a warning. The promise is that Christ will guard His Church through the fiery trial that is coming (1 St. Peter iv. 12); the assurance is that He will come quickly—the time of waiting will not be long; the warning is that the Church must not grow overconfident and so lose the victor's crown (ch. ii. 10). However faithful a Church may be, it is never above the need of vigilant watchfulness.

St. Ignatius writes of the Philadelphian Church as "rejoicing in the passion and resurrection of the Lord

without wavering," but he warns them to follow the Shepherd lest they be devoured by wolves.

The Promise

Perhaps the reference is to 1 Kings vii. 21, but there the pillars are in the porch of the Temple; here they are in the Temple itself. The special thought is stability and permanence. "He shall go out no more." On each pillar is engraven a threefold inscription. The name of God was put upon the faithful Israelite by the priestly blessing (Num. vi. 27). "The name of the city of my God" is the name of the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. xii. 22)—the city whereof all the elect are citizens (Phil. iii. 20). "My new name" is the name that expresses the full glory of the risen Christ (1 St. John iii. 2). The victor's reward is to see the glory of God, to share the fellowship of the saints, to live in the life of Christ. So the Christian is baptized into the threefold name—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost who is the Builder of the true Temple (Heb. viii. 2; 1 St. Peter ii. 4). Of the seven churches of Asia "Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage. . . . Among the Greek colonies and churches in Asia Philadelphia is still erect—a column in a scene of ruins; a pleasing example that the paths of honour and safety may sometimes be the same" (Gibbon).

XIV.—THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA

(iii. 14–22)

THE Church in Laodicea was apparently free from hostility from without and from false teaching within. Like the city to which it belonged, it was rich, prosperous, and contented. How startling must

have been the effect of the stern message that threatened the Church with rejection, as some nauseous thing is ejected from the human body. Yet how the yearning of love breaks through the stern words of condemnation.

The Speaker

The threefold description seems to correspond to three stages in the divine process of revelation. Christ is the Amen—the ultimate reality (" the Truth," St. John xiv. 6). Compare our Lord's frequent use of the phrase, " verily, verily " (Gk. amen, amen). Then the truth became flesh that He might be " the faithful and true witness," the one adequate revelation of the whole nature of God; then from the incarnation the description goes back to the created universe as the expression of the life of the Son of God. He is not the beginning of the creation (as the Arians taught), but the beginner of creation (Col. i. 15, 18; St. John i. 3). To a Church that was living in delusions Christ reveals Himself as the source of all truth.

The Condemnation

The sin of the Church was lukewarmness. " A draught of tepid water provokes nausea, and a tepid Christianity is nauseous to Christ " (Swete). Prof. Ramsay suggests an allusion to the hot springs at Hierapolis, six miles away, that flowed across the plateau and poured down the cliff at Laodicea in a lukewarm state. Lukewarmness shows itself in unworthy self-satisfaction—the sense of need has died out of the Church: it has ceased to be hungry (St. Matt. v. 6; St. Luke i. 53). Yet in truth it is wretched (Rom. vii. 24), and miserable (1 Cor. xv. 19), a blind beggar in rags. The call to buy reminds us

of Isa. lv. 1. As Laodicea was famous as a centre for banking and for the manufacture of a special kind of black cloth, and for an eye-powder supplied at the neighbouring temple of Asklepios, Prof. Ramsay suggests that the invitation here is coloured by local allusions. "Use your effort to gain, not the gold of the bankers, but the true gold, pure from human dross (cp. 1 St. Peter i. 7), not the black cloth of Laodicea, but the white robes of Christian purity, not the eye-powder of Asklepios, but the true eye-salve that can open blind eyes to see." Notice the threefold gift of Christ to His Church—wealth, purity, insight.

The Invitation

The message changes to tenderness. Verbal rebukes and acts of chastisement are the evidence of divine love (Heb. xii. 6) for the Church. Even more tenderly beautiful is the picture that follows (Cant. v. 2) of Christ waiting patiently outside the door for the invitation to enter and eat with His disciple, as He ate with the two at Emmaus, when He was known to them in the breaking of bread (cp. St. John xiv. 23). To a Church satisfied with itself, and having need of nothing, He says: "You have need of Me, for you have left Me outside." We are reminded of St. Luke xii. 36; St. Matt. xxiv. 33. In judgment Christ knocks at the door of the Church; if she will open He will come in, not as her Judge, but as her Guest. Is it not He who is knocking at the door of the Church to-day? And is there no danger that we may be so busy rearranging our furniture that we may not hear His voice? It is not only lukewarmness, but also bustling activity that sometimes leaves the door shut (St. Luke x. 42).

The Promise

Jesus Christ had promised His disciples that they should share His authority (St. Luke xxii. 29; St. Matt. xix. 28), but here the promise is of more intimate fellowship (St. John xvii. 21). The reward of Christ's victory was His assumption of the full authority of the Divine (Psalm cx. 1; St. Matt. xxviii. 18). So the reward of the victory of His disciple is to share the authority of Christ. The mention of the two thrones is meant to express the thought that the life of the glorified Christ is a twofold life. There is a divine authority that He can share with no created being, an incommunicable Oneness with the Father that is His alone; yet there is a divinely human life in which He is our Paraclete (1 St. John ii. 1), and in union with which life every victorious disciple finds his true destiny. The throne of God is for Christ alone; the throne of Christ is for all His faithful followers. So the Church in Laodicea is reminded that its true wealth and honour must be won through conflict, not in tepid contentment. The throne is for those who overcome.

XV.—THE VISION OF HEAVEN

(iv. 1–11)

THE messages to the seven Churches form a prologue to the series of seven visions that follow. The first of these (The Sealed Book) is introduced by a picture of Heaven, seen through the open door. Again the great voice of ch. i. 10 speaks, and again the seer is "in the spirit." Notice how the symbols of the earlier chapters recur—the open door, the seven spirits of God, the throne, the victor-crown, the

Paradise of God (suggested by the Cherubim, Gen. iii. 24). The description that follows is based on Isa. vi., Ezek. i. x., and Dan. vii.

The Vision of God

The first object that caught the eye of the seer as he looked through the door was a throne standing in Heaven, and the consciousness of a Being sitting there. But all he saw was a dazzling brightness like the flashing colours of precious stones. The jasper ("clear as crystal," ch. xxi. 11), the sard (an opaque red stone), and the emerald were among the most highly valued jewels of the ancient world. It is the resplendent beauty of the Divine that the writer tries to convey. Is it altogether too fanciful to see in the suggestion of a threefold brightness a hint of the mysterious threefoldness of God; the green, translucent light of the jasper suggesting the eternal light of God; the red glow of the sard, or *carnelian*, speaking of the Incarnate "Word made flesh;" and the iris or aureole of emerald green the diffused radiance of the Divine Spirit encircling the throne (Ezek. i. 28)?

What the seer heard was as vague as what he saw. The "lightnings and thunderings and voices" recall Exod. xix. 16. The words convey the idea of ceaseless activity—specially perhaps the activity of judgment. God is always judging the world (1 St. Peter i. 17). The seven torches of fire burning before the throne, and the appearance like a sea of transparent glass, seem to symbolise the rest of the Eternal—no wind of change makes the torches flicker or ripples the surface of the sealike pavement of heaven (St. James i. 17).

The Elders

The circle of elders is generally regarded as representing the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, the leaders of the Jewish and Christian Church. They are enthroned as sharers in the divine authority, the senators and assessors of the court of heaven, their white robes are, perhaps, priestly garments (ch. i. 13), and their *stephanoi* are the symbols of victory (ch. ii. 10), not royal crowns (*diademata*). It is the wreath of the conqueror that they cast down before the throne. Their ascription of praise is not as yet the song of redemption; it is the Creator of all whom they worship. The distinctively Christian adoration—the "new song"—awaits the coming of the Lamb as it had been slain.

The Cherubim

The four living creatures are derived from Ezek. x., with some reminiscences of the Seraphim (fire-spirits) of Isa. vi. (the six wings—the song). They are four because they stand one on each side of the throne (not beneath the throne, as some commentators picture them); and also perhaps because four is the symbolic number for the created world. They are the symbolic representatives of created life, in its strength, fertility, wisdom, and swiftness. They are full of eyes (Ezek. i. 18; x. 12), for nature is ever vigilant; and winged, for nature is ever in movement; and "they rest not day or night," for nature is ever at work, and all its work is praise. Their song, like the song of the Seraphim in Isa. vi., is a threefold ascription of holiness to God the "all-ruling," who was (before all created things) and is (in all creation) and is to come (in the consummation of creation, Rom. viii. 19).

The whole picture is intentionally left vague. It flashes with light, and throbs with life. It is heaven waiting for the great drama to open. Reflected, as it were, on the glassy sea of this heaven—(" the blue sky like a transparent sea " (Porter)—the seer watches the drama of human history unfolding itself. In this first scene, creation in its first purity is seen doing homage to the Creator. " Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God," and humanity, hearing the sound of its praise, bows in adoration, ascribing glory and honour and power to Him through whose will (not " for whose pleasure ") they were (as thoughts in the mind of God) and were brought into being (as facts in the created universe). Between this and the next picture lies the breaking of the harmony of creation through sin, and the new revelation of God as Redeemer.

XVI.—THE VISION OF THE SEALED BOOK (v. 1–14)

THE writer of this Book was probably influenced, like the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, by Platonic philosophy, and the four living creatures and the elders of ch. iv. are to be thought of as the archetypes of creation (Heb. viii. 5)—the heavenly models of the living world of animals and men. In this chapter we are still in the timeless world of the eternal present. The seer is present at the moment when the news of the drama of redemption wrought out in the world of time becomes known in the heavenly places (Eph. iii. 10).

The Sealed Book

The imagery here is from Ezek. ii. 9. What the seer sees is a roll resting on an unseen hand. The roll

is the record of the divine judgments ; it is filled with writing on both sides, for God's purpose is complete ; it is sealed with seven seals because it is known only to God (Dan. xii. 9). No created being, in heaven, or earth, or hades, can share the counsels of God (St. Mark xiii. 32) or reveal them to man. And man's passionate desire to know expresses itself in the tears of the seer. Insight into spiritual things is often won by tears.

The Victory of the Lamb

To him that overcometh will I grant to unseal the roll. Is there no victor to claim the prize ? Yes. One lion-like in His strength (Gen. xlix. 9), royal in His descent (Isa. xi. 1) has overcome. And as the seer looks there appears in the centre of the group, not a lion or a king, but a lamb (lit. a little lamb) standing and bearing marks of slaughter. Strange symbol of a conqueror ! The lion conquers by strength, but the lamb by gentleness and patient endurance (Isa. liii. 7) ; not by the sacrifice of others, but by the sacrifice of itself. " In the midst of the throne," at the heart of the universe, stands the eternal law of sacrifice that found its earthly expression in the Jewish sacrificial system and its supreme vindication on Calvary (St. John i. 36). It is as the Redeemer of men that Jesus Christ becomes the Revealer of the whole counsel of God. He is the Judge of all men because He is the Saviour of all (St. John v. 22 ; Acts xvii. 31). The roll wherein is written the whole course of human destiny is committed to His keeping.

The seven horns symbolise perfect strength (for the horn as a symbol of power see Deut. xxxiii. 17 ; 1 Sam. ii. 1 ; St. Luke i. 69), and the seven eyes (Zech. iv. 10) perfect knowledge. Of this perfect knowledge

the Spirit of God is the Agent. Notice the three symbols of the Holy Spirit—the emerald rainbow, the torches burning before the throne, the seven eyes of the Lamb sent forth into all the earth. In all three the idea of *illumination* is prominent.

The Three Songs

The song of the elders. Each elder has a harp and an incense-cup (Exod. xxv. 29); for the Church's perpetual offering is twofold—praise and prayer. The song is no longer the song of creation, it is a "new song," the song of redemption. The word "us," should probably be omitted; it is not their personal redemption of which they sing, but of the redemption of humanity, made a kingdom and priests (1 St. Peter ii. 9), and already reigning (not "shall reign") on the earth in virtue of their oneness with the Divine King. Jesus Christ reigns now on earth (St. Matt. xxviii. 18) though men repudiate His authority. And every subject in His Kingdom is not only a subject, but a king. *Cui servire regnare est.*

The song of the angels. The seer suddenly sees the whole background of the scene crowded with a vast host of angels (Dan. vii. 10) invisible before (was it because redemption restores us to the consciousness of the great fellowship, Heb. xii. 22; St. Luke xv. 10?). Their ascription of praise is sevenfold, expressing the completeness of celestial worship. Every attribute is significant. On earth the Lamb of God had seemed powerless and poor and unlearned and weak, and had borne dishonour and shame and the curse. But in heaven the angels acclaim His power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing.

The song of creation. The seer hears another great

roar of praise, rising, as it were, from below, as nature, in its fourfold life, joins in the song of praise. Here the ascription links the Divine Father and Son in one, in a fourfold attribution of praise. And the Cherubim (nature in its ideal) close the doxology of nature in its actuality, while the elders, representing the Church, fall down before the throne to adore.

XVII.—THE OPENING OF THE SEALS

(vi. 1–17)

THE writer pictures the breaking of each seal as revealing a chapter of the divine judgment. The first four seals (according to the usual apocalyptic numerical system) have to do with this world, the other three with the spiritual world. Each of these four is introduced by an appeal by one of the living creatures, "Come," addressed not to the seer, but to the Lamb (cp. ch. xxii. 17). The cry of redeemed nature is "Come" (cp. Rom. viii. 19). The words "and see" are not in the original text.

The Judgment of the Empire

The vision of the four horses is suggested by Zech. vi. They represent the divine judgment on militarism—the war-spirit of the victorious empire. The rider on the white horse is the symbol of conquest, the triumphant spirit of aggressive Imperialism (not to be identified with the spiritual conqueror of ch. xix. 11). After conquest follows war on a red horse (for no peace can ever be founded on mere conquest); then after war comes famine on a black horse. In ordinary circumstances a denarius would buy eight "measures" of wheat, so the meaning of the voice is that wheat has risen to eight times its normal price.

The voice is a warning to the rider on the black horse not to surpass the appointed limit in his depredations. Then follows death on a pale horse, with his inseparable companion, Hades, bringing the four "sore judgments" (Ezek. xiv. 21) on the earth, and destroying one-fourth of mankind. The contrast between the splendid white-horsed figure of triumph and the ghastly scene of desolation is very striking. God's judgment on aggressive war and worldly ambition is written in human history.

The Judgment of the Jewish Church

The fifth seal carries us into the spiritual world. The altar of burnt offering in the outer court of the Temple is seen, and under it, in the place where the blood of the sacrifices was poured out (Lev. iv. 7), appear the souls of the martyrs of the Jewish Church, crying, like the blood of Abel (Gen. iv. 10; St. Matt. xxiii. 35), for vengeance. The prayer is addressed to God, the *Despotes*. In the wonderful words that follow the writer takes up the thought of Heb. xi. 40. The martyrs of the Jewish Church are comforted with the white robe (ch. iii. 4; xix. 8) and the promise that justice will be rendered in the end, when the martyr-roll is complete by the addition of the martyrs of the Christian Church. They are not bidden merely to wait, but to *rest*, for a little while. (Some commentators take the "souls under the altar" to be the earlier Christian martyrs, but the above interpretation seems much more probable).

The Judgment of the World

The opening of the sixth seal is followed by the vision of a great world-catastrophe described in

apocalyptic language gathered from the prophets. In the apocalyptic view of history the Divine Kingdom does not come by a process of gradual evolution, but follows on the crash of human society. Perhaps the conditions in which we are living may enable us to recognise the essential truth that underlies this imagery derived from the convulsions of nature. Our easy dreams of the gradual improvement of human society have been shattered; we are seeing before us the judgment of God on the spirit that sets the dream of world-power in place of God, as the Roman Empire of the first century did. The seven groups of men represent the whole social order of mankind, crying for refuge from the presence of God (Hos. x. 8; Isa. ii. 19), as Adam and Eve hid themselves in their first consciousness of sin (Gen. iii. 8). The desire to escape from God is the last awful evidence of apostasy. "The wrath of the Lamb" is more terrible because it is the wrath of outraged gentleness. The phrase reminds us of an aspect of the character of Christ that modern times have been in danger of forgetting. Men cannot ignore the claims of Christ with impunity; forgiveness does not mean easy-going toleration of evil.

The sixth seal inaugurates the final judgment, and we should expect the seventh to usher in the new kingdom. But instead of this, it is followed by the seven trumpets, as the last of these is by the seven bowls. What does the writer mean by this? Perhaps that there is not one last judgment, but many. The close of each age seems to be the end, but history reopens, and "the end is not yet." The drama of world-history has many acts, and each act is a judgment of God.

XVIII.—THE CHURCH MILITANT AND TRIUMPHANT

(vii. 1–viii. 1)

THE last chapter closes with a picture of human society going down to ruin. How will the Church fare in this day of judgment? The answer to the question is given in this chapter, where the seer is shown first the sealing of that part of the Church which is still on earth, and then the gathering of the great multitude, the Church of the redeemed in Heaven.

The Church Militant

The wind is the symbol of divine intervention (St. John iii. 8; Acts ii. 2); here the four wind-angels are the executors of the divine judgment (cp. Zech. vi. 5). But before the tempest breaks, and the world-order is swept away, the faithful remnant must be sealed (Eph. iv. 30). "The Lord knoweth them that are His," and none of them shall perish. The angel who bears the signet-ring of God rises from the east, for the faithful are the children of the day (1 Thess. v. 5). The sealing is a sign of divine ownership, in contrast with the mark of the beast (ch. xiii. 16). And those who are sealed are the mystical Israel of God. The number twelve (3×4) and a thousand ($10 \times 10 \times 10$, a perfect cube, cp. ch. xxi. 16) are both symbols of completeness. The number of God's elect is complete before the final judgment. The seer does not see the sealing, because it takes place on the earth, but he hears the number. The omission of Dan from the list of tribes is perhaps due to the fact that the tribe became extinct—a destiny thought to be foretold in the description of Dan as the serpent-tribe (Gen.

xlix. 17). Manasseh appears in its place, as Matthias takes the place of Judas in the company of the apostles. The idea of the sealing of the faithful is probably derived from Exod. xxviii. 36–38.

The Church Triumphant

The 144,000 are still in danger. But the next vision is the vision of a great multitude who have passed through danger to victory. The Feast of Tabernacles was the great annual feast of rejoicing and fellowship, when all the harvest had been gathered in, and the people lived in booths and carried palm-branches (Lev. xxiii.) in memory of their deliverance from Egypt. So here the great multitude that have passed through the great tribulation that was expected to precede the final judgment (Dan. xii. 1), and have exchanged the bloodstained robes of martyrdom for garments washed white in the blood of the Lamb, keep their Feast of Tabernacles in the presence of God, who "spreads His tabernacle over them" (not merely "dwells among them"). The description that follows is derived from Isa. xl. 11; xlix. 10, and perhaps Psalm xxiii.—"the Lamb . . . shall tend them as a shepherd (St. John xxi. 17), and lead them unto fountains of waters of life" (St. John iv. 10). The song of the redeemed ("the salvation *we enjoy we ascribe* unto our God") recalls the Hosanna ("Save now") of the people at the Tabernacle Feast (2 Macc. x. 6, cp. Psalm cxviii. 25). In ch. v. the seer had heard the company of angels; now he sees them in a great circle around the throne, offering their sevenfold ascription of praise to God. The whole scene reminds us of Heb. xii. 23.

The Seventh Seal

As the six days of creation are followed by the

Sabbath of divine rest, so here the six days of judgment are followed by the Sabbath rest of the people of God (Heb. iv. 9). The visions and voices cease; the final judgment is over; time is merged in eternity. Human vision cannot penetrate into the wonders of that new world (cp. 2 Cor. xii. 4). But why "half an hour"? In this book a half is the symbol of an incomplete action (cp. three-and-a-half years, ch. xi. 2, Dan. vii. 25, five (half of ten), ch. ix. 5, etc.); so here "half an hour" means "there was silence in Heaven (a cessation of visions) followed by the opening of a new series." The seer stood waiting, knowing that the revelation would be resumed in a new form. The course of world-history is represented in three forms—the opening of seven seals; the blowing of seven trumpets; the pouring out of seven bowls. The significance of this arrangement becomes clear if the three series are read in parallel columns instead of consecutively. It is therefore better to regard ch. viii. 2 as opening a new section of the book than as the result of the opening of the seventh seal. The last trumpet and the last bowl usher in the final catastrophe; but here the story is carried a stage further, into the eternal life that the symbols of time and space cannot express. So the vision ends in silence. "It hath not yet been manifested what we shall be."

XIX.—THE FIRST FIVE TRUMPETS

(viii. 2–xi. 11)

THE symbolism of these scenes of judgment is derived in part from the plagues of Egypt. A comparison between the Emperor and Pharaoh could not be openly made, but would be understood

by the readers. As in the case of the seals, the trumpets fall into two groups, the first four being less detailed than the last three.

The Vindication of the Saints

Before the judgment begins, the scene of ch. vi. 9 is carried a stage further. There the saints are praying for the vindication of their cause; here the vindication is given. The scene is explained by the ritual of the tabernacle in Lev. xvi. 12, 13. The angel-priest fills a censer with glowing charcoal from the great altar of burnt offering (cp. Isa. vi. 6), and carries it into the Holy Place, where the server gives him the incense to offer. Then, when the prayers of the saints have gone up, fragrant with incense, to God, he comes back to the great altar, and, setting light to the contents of the censer, empties them on the earth below to express the fact that the prayers of the saints for judgment have been accepted. As he does so, a confused noise arises from the earth, of which the significance is described in the seven trumpets.

The Four Trumpets

The earlier trumpets suggest not only the plagues of Egypt, but also the story of creation. The days of creation are reversed, and the green things, the sea, and the heavenly bodies are successively stricken. Notice also the ascending series—first, the vegetable world is smitten, then living creatures, then man, and, finally, the powers of heaven. The "third part" probably means that the destruction is, as yet, only partial. The general idea is that judgment begins with the restriction of nature's

provision for human need. It is notable that the first three acts of judgment are calamities brought about by *falling* bodies—hail, the burnt mountain (Jer. li. 25), the meteor called Wormwood (wormwood is the name of a bitter herb, and is used in the Old Testament as a symbol of calamity, Lam. iii. 15; Amos v. 7). It is from above that judgment comes down on the doomed world. It is not easy to say whether this imagery has a specific significance —whether, for example, the burnt mountain is the Roman Empire and the falling meteor some notable ruler. If we knew more certainly the date of the Apocalypse we might be able to understand some allusions that at present baffle us.

The Fifth Trumpet

The eagle (not "angel") flying in mid-heaven, hurrying as a bird of prey to the field of carnage, introduces the second group of trumpet-judgments, more dire and dreadful than the last. As in the case of the seals, the action of these last judgments begins in the spiritual world. They fall on "them that dwell in the earth" (*katoikeo*), as distinct from those who pass through the earth as pilgrims (*paroikeo*) cp. ch. xiv. 6. The first of these last three plagues is let loose upon the earth by "a star fallen from heaven," perhaps with reference to St. Luke x. 18 (cp. Isa. xiv. 12). In the words that follow there is the characteristic tendency of the writer to depict evil as parodying good. So the fallen angel has the keys of the abyss, as Christ has the keys of hades and of death (ch. i. 18); the pit has its smoke, as heaven has its incense (ch. viii. 3). The description of the locusts of hell recalls Joel i. 6–7; ii. 2–9, as well as the plague of locusts

in Egypt. But these are scorpion-locusts, who do not feed on the trees and green things, but attack men. Their work is not to destroy, but to torment. Evil may seem seductive, but "at last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." So the writer pictures this monstrous swarm of locust-demons let loose on the world, under their demon-king Apollyon (the destroyer), for "five months," that is, for a certain period not unlimited in duration (five—one-half of ten).

What does all this mean? It means that the writer believed that one sign of the end would be new forms of wickedness let loose upon human society, vices that torment so that death seems a desirable yet impossible means of escape. The writer had no idea of the gradual evolution of a better world. Like St. Augustine, in the *City of God*, he believed that good and evil would develop side by side, evil growing more evil as good became more manifest. The judgment reaches a new stage when men begin to see evil as hateful and monstrous, and yet know that they cannot escape from it.

XX.—THE SIXTH TRUMPET

(ix. 13–21)

THE fifth trumpet, under the symbol of a locust-swarm, shows internal corruption pouring out on the world. The "second woe" represents the inroad of external enemies breaking in on the Roman world out of the mysterious East. An empire poisoned by the scorpions of vice cannot resist external attack.

The Voice from the Altar

The golden altar of incense, on which the prayers of the saints had been offered, now reappears. The four horns at the corners of the altar (Exod. xxx. 2) were the symbols of strength—here specially the potency of prayer. So the blood of atonement was sprinkled once every year on the horns of the golden altar (Exod. xxx. 10). The Voice is the answer to the prayers for judgment (ch. viii. 3)—the response to the cry of the souls in ch. vi. 9. The Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, as it had been the boundary of the kingdom of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 21). It was the frontier of the civilised world, beyond which dwelt savage tribes ready to break into the empire, as Parthians, Persians, Turks, and Tartars broke in at different periods of history. While the Empire remained strong, the forces of destruction, symbolised here by four angels (four being the number of earthly things) were bound till the appointed time. At the time when the Apocalypse was written, the rulers of the empire were beginning to turn anxious eyes towards the East. It was not merely the material prosperity of the empire that was in danger; beyond the Euphrates lay the spiritual forces of evil associated with the name of Babylon. It was from beyond the Euphrates that the prophets had looked for the dark hosts of judgment (Isa. viii. 5–8).

"An hour, and a day, and a month, and a year," probably simply means "an appointed time." It represents the thought, common to all the apocalyptic writers, that human history is controlled by the purpose of God. The great crises of history are the outcome of His all-ruling will.

The Destroying Horsemen

Horses were to the Jewish prophets the symbol of the Gentile world—of brute strength and ruthless conquest (Hab. i. 5–10; Deut. xvii. 16; Hos. xiv. 3). The number of the horsemen recalls Psalm lxviii. 17.

Like the locust-hosts, the horsemen are supernatural in their attributes. Their breastplates are fire and purple smoke (jacinth-coloured) and brimstone, and the "third part" (that is, less than the whole) of mankind are burnt, or suffocated, or poisoned (Hab. i. 8). Exactly what is meant by the serpent-tails of the horses is not clear. Perhaps it is merely intended to heighten the terror of the description. Escape was impossible, since the demon horses breathe fire in front and sting behind.

The Impenitent World

Throughout this book we hear nothing of repentance. As the terrors of judgment fall on the doomed world, men grow more reckless in their wickedness. When men have rejected the opportunity of repentance, they are at last left to the fate that they have chosen. The evil of the world is described in two aspects, corresponding to the two Tables of the Law. For the worship of demons, see 1 Cor. x. 20. As demon-worship was a breach of the first Commandment, the worship of idols was a breach of the second. The essential evil of idol-worship was that it was an attempt to bring down God to the level of human ideas instead of lifting human ideas to the eternal world. The Ascension carried up the material into the heavenly places, that we might "in heart and mind thither ascend."

The second group of four sins represent the outcome of idolatry (Rom. i. 28–31). For the same sins, see St. Mark vii. 21 ; Gal. v. 20. The special evils in the heathen world, against which the early Church was in perpetual contest, were its disregard for the sanctity of human life, its resort to strange forms of sorcery, its deep-seated impurity, and its dishonesty. Whenever the influence of Christianity declines, these evils reappear. The present war has led to a great revival of superstition and impurity, and in Germany the statistics of crimes of violence show an appalling growth of brutality. Human society cannot hold together without the moral influence of religion. When men cease to worship God, human fellowship decays and the world " reels back into the beast." As in the story of the Flood, so here, the judgment of God falls on a world that has already judged itself by choosing evil rather than good. The tree is not cut down till its evil fruit is the witness of its hopeless failure to respond to the care of the husbandman.

XXI.—THE STRONG ANGEL AND THE LITTLE ROLL

(x. 1–11)

THE seventh trumpet, like the seventh seal, is preceded by two visions. The first of these represents the call of the writer to a new task ; the second shows what that new task is to be. The seer is still in heaven, looking down, as it were, on the world below, till he is sent to take the roll. In the visions that follow he is looking up into heaven from below.

The Strong Angel

The strong angel is the executive agent of the divine judgment (not our Lord, as some commentators suggest), and is, therefore, clothed with the attributes of the Divine—the cloud of the *shekinah*, the countenance like the sun, the feet of burnished brass (ch. i. 7, 15, 16). He bestrides the world, a colossal figure, and his voice sounds like the roar of a lion. Yet it is a message of mercy that he brings, and therefore a rainbow is upon his head, for the rainbow is the symbol of the divine mercy in the day of judgment. His message, confirmed with a solemn oath, is not that there shall be no more time, but that there shall be no more delay—such delay as is suggested in ch. vi. 11 (cp. St. Mark xiii. 20). The long-delayed victory of the Church is near at last (2 St. Peter iii. 8–9). But the articulate message is preceded by a loud shout, to which seven thunders respond, not as mere echoes, but uttering "their own voices." The oath of the angel, and the command not to write what the thunders had spoken, are derived from Dan. xii. 7–9, where the idea is that revelations about the end will be unintelligible till the end itself draws near. The drama of judgment may be revealed in symbol, but the spiritual forces that lie behind it cannot be revealed to human comprehension. The thunders of God are mysterious as the wind of God (St. John iii. 8). St. Paul also was initiated into secrets impossible of utterance (2 Cor. xii. 4). Our Lord's revelation of Himself was limited by the capacity of the disciples to understand (St. John xvi. 12). So before the prophet receives his commission he must learn that our knowledge of the purposes of

God is incomplete. Enough for our needs He vouchsafes to reveal, but the voices that speak His inner counsels are inarticulate to human ears.

The Call of the Prophet

The symbolism here is, of course, derived from Ezek. iii. The taking of the roll represents the deliberate acceptance by the prophet of the commission to which he was called. Cp. Isa. vi. As the roll of ch. v. represents the whole counsel of God, so the little roll represents that part of His counsel that the prophet is charged to deliver. The voice here is like the voice in Isa. vi. 8, saying, Whom shall I send? And as Isaiah is warned that the messenger of God must face disappointment and failure, so here the prophet is told that sweetness and bitterness are strangely blended in the task of the messenger of Christ. To be admitted to the knowledge of the purpose of God is sweet (Psalm xl. 8; Jer. xv. 16). But it is bitter to carry to men a message of judgment—doubly bitter when the message is to the society to which we belong (Rom. ix. 2, 3). As we shall see, the special commission to which this vision was an introduction was not to the world, but to the Church. Every faithful minister of Christ knows something of the bitter-sweetness of the pastoral office. The Good Shepherd leadeth forth His sheep, but he also giveth His life for the sheep. The joy of the shepherd over the sheep that was lost was purchased by the bitterness of the cross.

The symbolism of the eating of the roll is expressed in the words of the collect—"read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest." The message we are to give must first become a part of ourselves. It

is true of all teaching that we can only impart what we have assimilated. Our Lord's words were spirit and life because they were a real part of Himself (St. John vi. 63). Personality is God's channel of revelation; unless the message is ours as well as God's, it does not ring true.

The prophet is warned that he must speak concerning (not "before," as in the Authorised Version) peoples and nations and tongues. The prophets were men compelled to speak (Psalm xxxix. 3; Jer. xx. 9), and St. Paul felt that he was "in trust" with the Gospel (1 Cor. ix. 16; Rom. i. 14), both in its mercy and its sternness. To know the truth and not to speak it, is to incur the penalty of unfaithfulness. So the prophet is warned to recognise the vast range of the revelations that are to be committed to his trust, and their world-wide significance.

XXII.—FAITHFULNESS AND APOSTASY

(xi. 1–14)

IN ch. vii. the Church is represented as the company of the faithful, sealed by the angel of the sunrise. But the letters to the Churches show us the Church sometimes as a society within which a faithful remnant strives to keep alive the Christian ideal from which others are drifting away. The two pictures presented here recall the letters to the Churches of Pergamum and Sardis. They tell us of a Church into which the world has begun to intrude, and then of a Church almost wholly one with the world, within which a faithful remnant seems to be witnessing in vain.

The Measuring of the Sanctuary

The "measuring" of the Holy City, or the Temple (Zech. ii. 1–2; Ezek. xl. 2–5), like the "sealing" of ch. vii., expresses God's protecting care over His own. He measures what He desires to keep. So the seer is charged to measure the sanctuary and the altar of burnt offering and the worshippers—that is, the Christian Church in three aspects—as the dwelling-place of God; as the place of sacrifice; as the assembly of worshippers. But the outer court is to be "cast out" (the word used for excommunication—St. John ix. 34). The outer court is the "Court of the Gentiles" of Herod's temple, but here it is not the way of approach by which the Gentiles draw near to God, but the part of the sanctuary that has been trodden down by the Gentiles (St. Luke xxi. 22)—the section of the Church that has been overcome by the world. The period of forty-two months ($3\frac{1}{2}$ years) appears in Dan. vii. 25; xii. 7, as the period of the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, and so of the victory of the world over the Church. It has also a symbolical significance as a bisected seven—a period left incomplete.

The Two Witnesses

By a strangely rapid transition we pass to a description, apparently communicated by Christ Himself, of the witness and fate of "two witnesses." The reference is, of course, to Zech. iv., where Zerubbabel and Joshua are pictured as two olive trees feeding the golden lamp before God. But the writer is also thinking of the two great representatives of the Old Dispensation, Moses (or

perhaps Enoch) and Elijah (St. Mark ix. 4). So here the Moses and Elijah of the New Dispensation represent the faithful remnant that holds true to God in the midst of a Church that has become apostate (cp. ch. iii. 4). They are endowed with the powers that Moses and Elijah exercised, and till their witness is finished they are invulnerable. They maintain their witness through the whole period of Gentile supremacy. Then the wild beast from the abyss, the world-empire that had slain our Lord (Dan. vii. 3), slays His witnesses, and in the Holy City, now become as Sodom or Egypt through its apostasy (cp. Isa. i. 9), the world rejoices over their death. It is a short-lived triumph—only 3½ days (one day for each year of their witness): and then God interposes, as in Ezek. xxxvii. 10. Like its Master, the faithful remnant of the Church passes through death to resurrection and ascension. Just when the world is celebrating its triumph it is stricken with sudden fear by the revival of what it thought it had destroyed. The great earthquake recalls the earthquake associated with the Crucifixion (St. Matt. xxvii. 51), and with the Resurrection (St. Matt. xxviii. 2). What is the lesson taught in this obscure section of the book? It is, first, a warning against the idea that membership of the outward Church will suffice to guarantee that "faithfulness unto death" that wins the crown of life. God will never leave Himself without witness; even in the darkest days a faithful few will keep the light burning. But their way will be the way of the cross; the world that rejected their Lord will reject their witness (St. John xv. 20); through loneliness and at last through death, they will follow His steps. It is only when the world

has slain its prophets that it begins to recognise the truth of their message. The closing words—"they gave glory to the God of Heaven"—do not suggest any real act of repentance, but rather the reluctant acknowledgment, too late, of the reality of the spiritual powers that they had ignored.

The writer is warning his readers against the easy optimism that thinks of the Church as growing steadily in prosperity and influence through the centuries. He believes that as the end draws near the Church will lose ground and only a faithful remnant be left to carry on their witness for truth. Or perhaps we should regard the picture rather as a warning than as a prediction—a vision of what might be if the spirit of compromise and worldliness were allowed to invade the Church, as it was already invading some of the Churches of Asia.

XXIII.—THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

(xi. 15–19)

THE seventh trumpet, like the seventh seal, introduces the final judgment of the world-empire. But in both cases it is not the judgment on earth, but its outcome in heaven that is revealed. When the seventh seal was opened there was silence in heaven, but when the seventh trumpet sounds there are great voices. Does this mean that the seer has grown in power of spiritual perception, so that what seemed like silence before is now silence become audible? We return now to heaven as the writer saw it in ch. iv. The "great voices" may be the voices of the four living creatures, and they are followed, as in ch. iv., by the song of the elders.

The Great Voices

The voices proclaim that "the kingdom" (not "kingdoms") "of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Anointed" (Acts iv. 26). The world-empire here is regarded as one, and as passing at last under the rule of its rightful sovereign. The phrase, "The Lord and His Anointed," takes us back to the Old Testament (Psalm ii. 2; cp. St. Luke ii. 26). The singular verb that follows is remarkable. "Our Lord and His Christ" are regarded as one. The idea of Christ's redelivery of the Kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. xv. 27) does not mean that His reign is over, but only that in the reunion of redeemed creation with God the unity of the Godhead is complete, the mediatorial work of the Son having achieved its purpose of reconciliation. The permanence of the Divine Kingdom is contrasted with the transitoriness of human world-empires (Heb. xii. 28). The Kingdom of Christ "shall have no end," because there is nothing higher beyond to which it leads. The Christian revelation is God's final unfolding of His Being and Character (Heb. i. 2). It is not in some further and fuller truth that humanity finds its goal, but in fuller understanding of the revelation given once for all when "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us."

The Song of the Elders

The song of the elders is the record of the final judgment, which is regarded as having already taken place. So God is described as He "who art and who wast" (omit "art to come"; the "coming" is regarded as completed). The elders

offer their thanksgiving because God has taken His great power and did reign. "The nations were angry (Psalm xcix. 1); Thy wrath came; and the time of the dead to be judged."

Three classes of persons are included in the promise of reward ("pay," St. Matt. xx. 8). The prophets are the leaders of the Church, and the saints the general body of members of the Church. But who are "them that fear My name"? The phrase is used in Acts to describe proselytes (Acts xiii. 16, 43). Here it seems to point to the larger company outside the Church who have been seekers after God "if haply they might feel after Him and find Him." As in the parable, "these last" are rewarded equally with the saints. The words "both small and great" apply to all three classes.

"Those that destroy the earth" is a striking phrase. The judgment on evil men is that they have turned the earth that God gave for man's use into ruin; so in the end they are involved in the ruin that they have caused.

The Open Sanctuary

When the judgment is over, the inner sanctuary of the heavenly Temple, before which stood the golden altar of incense (ch. viii. 3), is opened, the veil being drawn aside. The barrier that guarded the Holiest Place against human intrusion is no longer needed, and the ark of the covenant, of which the ark in the earthly tabernacle was a "figure" (Heb. viii. 5; ix. 24), is now seen as an expression of the truth that "the tabernacle of God is with men." The old covenant was ratified by the blood sprinkled once a year on the Mercy Seat (Heb. ix. 25); so now the heavenly Mercy Seat is open to human

sight; for the atoning work is done, and they who enter in are reconciled to God. Then for a moment the seer looks down, as it were, on the earth below. In heaven there is peace, but on earth there follow lightnings and voices and thunderings and an earthquake and a great hailstorm—a great outbreak of destructive forces poured out on a doomed world, as on the Cities of the Plain.

With this last vision of judgment the second series of visions ends. God has vindicated His cause and gathered His elect into His Kingdom. The world-empire that set itself to destroy His Church has itself been destroyed. The true King has established His everlasting Kingdom, and the long struggle for righteousness has ended in victory.

XXIV.—THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

(xii. 1–6)

IN interpreting this chapter we must keep in mind the idea that underlies all the writer's philosophy of history. In his view all human history has been a struggle between two ideals of life, which he pictures sometimes as two women (the bride and the harlot), sometimes as two cities (Jerusalem and Babylon), sometimes as two kingdoms. For the working out of the same thought in fuller detail see St. Augustine's "City of God." At the time when the Apocalypse was written the two ideals were represented by the Christian Church and the Roman Empire, as they had been represented in the days of the prophets by the Hebrew people and the great world-empire of Assyria or of Babylon.

The First Sign

The woman clothed with the sun is called a "great sign"—that is, a symbolical figure, not a literal woman. Perhaps there is also a reference to Isa. vii. 14—the "sign" given to Ahaz. The writer has in mind the promise of Gen. iii. 15. So he thinks of the spiritual forces of the world as represented by a woman clothed with the sun (Psalm civ. 2), standing on the moon, and crowned with a wreath of stars. The heavenly bodies are used here as the symbols of the spiritual powers of the higher world with which the Church of every age is endowed. And the travail of the woman represents the age-long suffering of the faithful people of God (Isa. lxvi. 7), and perhaps of all creation (Rom. viii. 19), till the Holy Spirit in the fulness of time brought into being the human life towards which all the spiritual hopes of the world had pointed—the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head.

The Second Sign

The dragon is the serpent of Gen. iii. 1, now grown into a fiery-red monster. Perhaps Isa. xxvii. 1 is in the mind of the writer, and some commentators think that the description of the dragon owes something to the influence of ancient Babylonian legend. Three special features of the satanic power are mentioned. The seven heads, each crowned with the diadem of sovereignty, tell us of the wide-extended empire of evil; the ten horns (Dan. vii. 7), of its many-sided power; the third part of the stars, drawn to the earth (Dan. viii. 10), of its mysterious influence in the spiritual world

(Eph. vi. 12). Some commentators see a reference here to the fall of the angels (Jude 6); but this is doubtful. The satanic power lies in wait for the coming of the promised seed. Herod, the pharisees and chief priests, and Pilate were all the agents of the spiritual powers of darkness that sought to compass the destruction of Jesus Christ. Behind them stood the prince of this world (St. John xiv. 30) fighting for the maintenance of his usurped authority.

The Twofold Deliverance

The phrase "a man child" may come from Jer. xx. 15. The prediction of Psalm ii. 8–9 is applied to Christ again in ch. xix. 15. The Resurrection and Ascension baffled the attacks of the Wicked One just when they seemed to have triumphed. On the throne of God the sacred humanity of Christ was for ever lifted above the assaults of evil.

The Church is not lifted at once into the heavenly places. Her place is in the wilderness, where, like Elijah, or the Children of Israel, she is nourished with supernatural food during the whole time (three and a half years) of Gentile supremacy. To her is fulfilled the words of Psalm xxiii.: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." Till her Lord returns, the Church is "a pilgrim and a stranger"—she is never at home in the world. Only in the "place prepared by God" can she be safe. The special purpose of this first section of the story is to bring out the rage and futility of the powers of evil—the special thought of Psalm ii. The hatred of the world was hard to bear, and the victory of Christ seemed indefinitely delayed. So the writer has a twofold message of consolation to the faithful company

against whom the whole power of the Empire was being called into exercise. His first message of comfort is that Jesus Christ is on the throne of God, the firstfruits of the redeemed society. And the second is that the wilderness—the life of isolation and detachment—to which the Church was called, was a place prepared by God, where, instead of human hospitality, God Himself would provide nourishment for His own. Lastly, he tells them that there is a divinely appointed limit of time—a destined hour when the powers of darkness will be overthrown and the Church's waiting time be over. Till then, Christ is waiting in Heaven and the Church on earth, and God is guarding both.

XXV.—WAR IN HEAVEN

(xii. 7–12)

THE Incarnation was a declaration of war against the powers of evil in the world that they claimed as their own (St. Luke iv. 6), and some phrases in the Gospels suggest that the conflict had a wider range and involved consequences in the spiritual order. See especially St. Luke x. 18; St. John xii. 31; Eph. vi. 12. So the writer pictures the war in heaven as following on the Ascension. According to Hebrew theology, Satan was not exiled from the presence of God before the time of Christ (Job i.; Zech. iii. 1). In Milton's "Paradise Lost" the war in heaven is represented as earlier than the beginning of creation (cp. Jude 6). But here it is the exaltation of Christ to the throne of God that "bruises the serpent's head." Humanity, in the person of its Anointed King, carries into the spiritual world the victory it has won through the

Cross and the Resurrection. For the Incarnation was not only the revelation of the whole truth of God on earth, but also the revelation of the whole truth of humanity in heaven (Eph. iii. 10). It is this victory of Christ that St. Paul refers to in Eph. i. 20.

The Warrior Archangel

There is no adequate ground for identifying Michael the Archangel with Christ. In the Book of Daniel (x. 13; xii. 1) Michael is represented as the champion of the Jewish people. He stands for the aggressive side of divine righteousness, as Gabriel represents its gentler ministries of service. He is the expression of the truth that God is ever at war against evil, that our human indignation against wrong is a reflection of a fact in the spiritual world. The holiness of God is not mild and tolerant, but aggressive and victorious. Even the name Michael ("who is like God?") has a note of challenge.

The Great Victory

In heaven the victory is complete. The writer gathers together the various names by which the spirit of evil was known in earlier Jewish thought. He is "that old serpent" of Gen. iii.; the *Diabolos* (false accuser); Satan (the enemy); "the deceiver of the whole world." The prince of evil is thus represented as seeking to injure mankind in three ways—by slander, by open hostility, by deception. He is now cast down from heaven to the earth, which is henceforth to be the sphere of his evil activity till he is at last cast forth into the abyss.

The Song of Victory

A great voice is heard in heaven celebrating the victory of God. The reference to "our brethren"

suggests that the voice is that of the redeemed multitude. The voice tells first of the victory in heaven—the vindication of God as Saviour, Potentate and Sovereign, and of the authority (St. Matt. xxviii. 18) of His Anointed. But the victory in heaven is also a victory on earth—a vindication of the faithful against whom the accuser set himself. So we return to the thought of overcoming—they overcame not "by" (as the means), but rather "because of" (as the cause), the blood of the Lamb and the word of their witness. This association of the death of the martyrs with the death of Christ is significant. His victory on the Cross made their deaths victorious. The early Church did not isolate the death of Christ as much as we are inclined to do. The Body of Christ suffered and triumphed in the martyrdom of its members, as it had suffered and triumphed in its Head. The words that follow—"Rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that tabernacle in them"—may have a reference to the Feast of Tabernacles, as in ch. vii. 9. After the victory comes the feast of gladness; the white-robed company with palms in their hands.

But the victory in heaven has another side. Evil will now concentrate itself on this world, only the more eager to ravage and destroy because it knows that its time is short. Some commentators take "the earth and the sea" to representing the civilised and uncivilised parts of the world. But it may mean no more than in ch. x. 5.

The picture presented in this passage of the struggle for truth on earth as the counterpart of a vaster struggle in the spiritual universe is one that we do not sufficiently remember. It was prominent in St. Paul's later epistles (see Col.

ii. 15). The Ascension carried the victory of the Resurrection into the eternal world. So He prepared a place (St. John xiv. 2) for His own, where no other will but the will of God was done, and no other authority recognized but His. Evil has no place in the world of reality; only here its power is still unbroken, but even here its reign is brief.

XXVI.—DANGER AND DELIVERANCE

(xii. 13–17)

THE purpose of the writer of the Apocalypse is to explain, in the symbolical language in which alone such explanation is possible, the events in the spiritual world that lay behind the sudden change in the policy of the Roman Empire that transformed it from a protecting to a persecuting power. His explanation is that the Ascension was a defeat for the powers of evil—a new limitation of their sphere of activity. Only on earth could they manifest their malignity, and as righteousness became incarnate in the Son of Man, so evil becomes incarnate in a son of darkness, an Antichrist. The closing verses of this chapter are an expansion of verse 6—a fuller description of the flight of the woman from the dragon.

The Assault of the Dragon

A great victory in heaven is followed by a fresh outbreak of war on earth. The drama of history is not to be explained by purely natural causes. When ambition, lust, envy, hatred have corrupted the life of individuals and nations, they become the agents of the powers of darkness, and whenever brute force sets itself against the Christian ideal of

fellowship and service, the old struggle of the Empire against the Church is renewed and Satan resumes his age-long war against the Son of God.

The serpent is described as emitting a flood of water to drown the woman as she escapes. The image is frequently used in the Old Testament for an outpouring of evil (Psalm xviii. 5; cxxiv. 4; Isa. xliii. 2). Here the writer is thinking of the early outbreaks of hostility to the Church, especially from the Jews, that threatened to sweep it away—such mob riots as those at Antioch (Acts xiii. 50; xiv. 5), Thessalonica (Acts xvii. 5), or Corinth (Acts xviii. 12).

The Deliverance of the Woman

Eagle's wings are the symbol of supernatural deliverance (Exod. xix. 4) or of supernatural strength (Isa. xl. 31). We need not look for recondite meanings of the number two. The seer pictures the woman as soaring into the air, where the dragon cannot follow her, with two great wings outspread, like an eagle hastening to his wilderness home. But what is meant by the earth helping the woman? If the explanation suggested above of the flood of water is correct, the swallowing up of the flood refers to the protection given to the early Church by the Roman authorities. St. Paul found his chief safeguard, under God, in the refusal of the Roman governors to tolerate mob violence. The secular authority (the "earth") helped the woman. The writer is about to explain how this attitude was changed, and he therefore reminds his readers that the Empire had been a friend to the Church till the spirit of evil raised up a beast by whom it was changed into an instrument of

evil (see 2 Thess. ii. 7). But by this time the woman had reached a place of safety. The spiritual values of the world were secure against the assault of brute force. At the appointed time the Church would be manifested as the Bride of the Lamb.

The Beginning of Persecution

The woman is not so much the actual Church as the ideal Church—the divinely appointed society that in every age has kept alive the knowledge of God. Of this divine society the visible Church of any period is a real though imperfect expression. The Christians of any particular time are "the rest of her seed." So here the dragon is represented as turning from the effort to destroy the ideal Church to attack the Christians of the first century. Persecution began with attacks on individuals; attempts to suppress the Church as a whole belong to a later period of history. Two characteristics of the Christian life are mentioned—obedience to the commandments of God and faithfulness in bearing witness to the name of Jesus. For the same thought, see 1 St. Peter iii. 15–17; iv. 15–16.

"And he stood upon the sand of the sea." The words belong to the description of the going of the dragon to make war on the seed of the woman; not, as in the Authorised Version, to the beginning of the next vision. The idea is that the dragon, finding that the earth is an ally of the woman, goes down to the seashore to call up from the sea (as in Dan. vii.) new allies for the conflict. Baffled of his prey, he grows more furious in his hate. Alike in world-history, and in the history of individual lives, the powers of evil are not overcome with one defeat (St. Luke iv. 13). They return to the attack

with fresh allies (St. Luke xi. 24, 26), and though the ideal Church is safe, the actual Church of every age can conquer only by perpetual watchfulness.

XXVII.—THE WILD BEAST FROM THE SEA

(xiii. 1–10)

IN the beginning of creation the Spirit of God brooded on the face of the waters; so here the spirit of evil calls out from the sea the monstrous creation through which he proposes to carry on his war against the saints. The four beasts in Dan. vii. rise out of the great sea (the Mediterranean, the centre of ancient civilisation), and in Isa. xvii. 13 the Gentile world is compared with a troubled sea (cp. Isa. lvii. 20).

The World-Empire

In Dan. vii. the successive world-empires are pictured as a series of wild beasts. The writer has united the four into one, since he thinks of the world-empires at every period of history as manifestations of the one great world-power that is always the opponent of God. The doom of every empire that forgets that the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men is that "a beast's heart is given to it" (Dan. iv. 16). The world-empire of the seer's vision is crafty and fierce as a leopard, remorseless as a bear, strong as a lion. Like the dragon, it has seven heads and ten horns—the symbols of far-reaching sovereignty and resistless power. The horns are crowned with ten diadems because they represent legitimate power misused (Rom. xiii. 1), not mere force. The heads bear blasphemous titles, such as those that the Emperors assumed in their claim to divine honours (cp.

2 Thess. ii. 4). The whole picture suggests untamed savagery and reckless arrogance. Though the writer is thinking of the great heathen empires of the world, he is undoubtedly pointing to the Roman Empire as the consummation of anti-Christian world-power. The sudden change of policy that Nero inaugurated is explained as due to satanic inspirations. Are nations, as well as individuals, capable of being possessed by the devil?

The Deadly Wound Healed

There is little doubt that the reference here is to the fall and suicide of Nero. The idea that Nero would return, either literally or in the person of another anti-Christian Emperor, was widely held both by Christians and by the popular mind. The thought seems to be present in the mind of the writer that the world-empire will win admiration by a parody of the death and resurrection of Christ. The whole verse was probably much more intelligible to those to whom it was written than it is to us. The world is depicted as wondering at the beast, and worshipping him and the dragon who has given him power. The words, "Who is like unto the beast?" are, of course, a parody of Exod. xv. 11, and perhaps of the name Michael ("Who is like God?"). The world bows down before brute force, not before moral strength. There is no doubt that the reference here is to the worship of the Emperor, the refusal to join in which was the excuse for the persecution of the early Christians.

The Divine Sentence

The writer says, in effect, "Attend carefully to what I am about to say." Then he adds the

mysterious words that follow. What do they mean? They recall St. Matt. xxvi. 52. The fact that they are associated with the patience and faith of the saints suggests that they convey a message of encouragement. They seem to teach that the moral law of God is supreme, even over world power and imperial decrees. They recall our Lord's words to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power against me except it were given thee from above." The wild beast might rage and ravage, but the captivity and doom for which he was appointed await him at the last. The Christians must not rise in insurrection against the persecuting Empire. They must suffer in patience (1 St. Peter iv. 16, 19), remembering that "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. xii. 19). Any attempt at rebellion would have given the Emperors exactly the opportunity that they wanted to declare open war against Christianity; it was the patient loyalty of the Christians that baffled their purpose and made persecution ineffective.

It is difficult for us to realise the feeling of helplessness and resentment that was awakened in the minds of the Christians by the undeserved sufferings that they endured under a Nero or a Domitian. So the writer of the Apocalypse tries to show that they are playing their part in an age-long conflict between God and the forces of evil. As the followers of the "Lamb that was slain" they must learn to endure and be faithful (2 Thess. i. 7 ff.). For the destined time there must be "truth for ever on the scaffold, wrong for ever on the throne," but at the appointed hour deliverance would come, and the Kingdom of Christ would conquer the brute-kingdoms of the world.

XXVIII—THE WILD BEAST FROM THE EARTH

(xiii. 11–18)

THE secular power of the Empire was not the only antagonist that the early Church had to meet. In the Epistles to the Churches apostate Judaism appears as the chief enemy of the faith. The alliance of Judaism with the pagan Empire began at the Crucifixion (St. John xix. 12). Behind this lay the whole religious life of the heathen world from which the Empire derived much of its power. All this religious antagonism is symbolised in the second wild beast, or false prophet.

The Second Beast

The Empire came into the Judæo-Christian world, as it were, from outside, but the religious antagonism arose from within—"from the earth." The Church worships the Lamb, so non-Christian religion wears lamb's horns—the symbol of innocence. Our Lord warned His disciples of false prophets who would come "in sheep's clothing" (St. Matt. vii. 15) in the deceitful appearance of friendliness (2 Thess. ii. 9). But the voice of the beast is the dragon-voice of the arch-enemy. The special work of this beast is to use religion to serve the interests of secular authority. Magic flourished in the Empire in the first century (Acts xiii. 6; xix. 19), and such tricks as calling down fire from heaven, and making images speak were probably familiar to the readers of the Apocalypse (see our Lord's warning in St. Matt. xxiv. 24). At a later time the statue of the emperor, set up in

every city of the Empire, became the centre of the idolatrous emperor-worship, of which the writer of this book saw the beginning. A refusal to offer incense before the imperial statue or bust was punishable by death.

The Mark of the Beast

As the servants of God are sealed on their foreheads in ch. vii., so here the servants of evil are marked on their right hand or on their forehead. The worship of the Emperor became the public evidence of loyalty. The earliest penalty of the profession of Christianity was outlawry from the social life of the time. The Christians were "boycotted" by their neighbours. It was only when this method failed to stamp out the new religion that the Roman authorities had recourse to more direct persecution. In the Decian persecution of the third century Christians who had offered sacrifice to the Emperor received certificates (*libelli*) that secured for them immunity from punishment. They were public evidences of their apostasy. The writer foresaw that some such measures were bound to follow any attempt to isolate and destroy the Christian society. It is difficult for us to realise how tremendously strong was the pressure of public opinion, reinforced by the coercive power of the Empire, on the little companies of Christians in the great cities of the Empire. See Browning's "Instans Tyrannus."

The degradation of religion to serve the ends of secular authority did not end with the abandonment of persecution in the fourth century. The "wild beast from the earth," masquerading as Christianity, has given its support to many of the worst

crimes of history. The attitude of the State Church in Germany during the present war seems to us an example of the same unholy alliance between ruthless aggression and religion.

The Number of the Beast

No text in the Bible has baffled commentators more completely than this one. The writer dared not say openly: "By the beast I mean the Emperor," so he conveys the thought to his readers by means of a symbol that they could probably understand; but the key to its meaning was lost before the end of the second century, for Irenæus understands it as little as modern writers on the subject. It is clear that the number represents a name. Both in the Hebrew and Greek alphabets each letter has a certain numerical value, but we do not know of which language the writer is thinking. The difficulty is further complicated by a well-supported alternative reading, which gives the number as 616. *Nero Cæsar*, in Hebrew (omitting a silent *Jod*), makes the number 616, or 666 if the name is used in its Greek form, *Neron*. But with a little ingenuity the symbol may be made to represent the name of almost every great figure in history, and it is better to confess that we cannot interpret the riddle. The symbol has also a numerical significance that was probably present to the mind of the writer. As seven is the perfect number, six represents permanent imperfection; so 666 is the symbol of a threefold falling short—a kind of trinity of failure, doomed to eternal futility on the very eve of success.

XXIX.—THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION

(xiv. 1–5)

THE three enemies of the Church—Satan, anti-Christian Imperialism, and false religion—have been presented by the seer on the stage of history. How could the Church hope to stand against so powerful a combination of opponents? The writer answers the question by showing us the great Leader of the Church who has gathered His Church around Him, and is about to go forth to the last conflict with the powers of darkness.

The Lamb on the Mount Zion

In ch. v. the Lamb is in heaven, but now He has come down to the succour of His Church. Mount Zion is the stronghold of true religion, as Babylon is the centre of the worship of the Beast. It is the City of God of St. Augustine's great book, the spiritual home of all the people of God (Heb. xii. 22). While the forces of evil assemble in the plain below (ch. xiii. 1) the company of the redeemed gather around their Lord on the mountain. It is significant that our Lord, the warrior-leader of the great struggle against evil, is described as "the Lamb of God" (St. John i. 29)—the sacrificial offering whose death has brought salvation. Love is not only gentle and forgiving, it is also stern and aggressive. We misrepresent Christianity when we speak of it only as the religion of patient endurance. It has another aspect; it stands for stern conflict and heroic enterprise.

The Song of Heaven

Mount Zion is not in heaven, but is so linked with heaven that the "new song" that the seer heard in heaven (ch. v. 9) is audible. It is a splendid thought that while the Church on earth is facing the storm of persecution and gathering for the last great struggle, the song of the redeemed in heaven breaks in, flooding the mountain with music. But the apostate world cannot hear or understand; the new song, like the new name (ch. ii. 17), can be known only by those who share God's secret. While we struggle and suffer in the great world-battle, as soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must listen for the new song and learn to sing it in our hearts that it may not be strange to us when we join the "multitude that no man can number" who sing it before the throne. The idea of heaven as a place of song suggests three special characteristics of the life of the redeemed. The world is a place of discord, sorrow, and selfishness; heaven is a state of harmony, gladness, and adoration.

The Company of the Redeemed

As we have already seen (in ch. vii.), the hundred and forty-four thousand represent the Church militant here on earth, sealed on their foreheads with the divine name (Eph. iv. 30). Jesus Christ is with His Church on earth in its hour of danger. Three special characteristics of the Church are suggested in these verses. (1) Its faithfulness. Throughout this book, as in the prophets, fornication is used in a spiritual sense for unfaithfulness to God. So here loyalty to Christ is represented as undefiled virginity (2 Cor. xi. 2). This verse gives no warrant

for the depreciation of marriage. (2) Its loyalty. The command, "Follow Me," was not only a call to fellowship and gladness, but also to suffering and endurance (St. Matt. x. 38; St. John xxi. 19). St. John was probably one of the two disciples who heard the Baptist's testimony, "Behold the Lamb of God," and "followed Jesus" (St. John i. 37). In the days of persecution not a few failed to abide the test (St. Matt. xiii. 21); it was those who followed undaunted to the end to whom the promise of the crown of life was given (ch. ii. 10). (3) Its sincerity. "In their mouth was found no lie" (contrast ch. xxi. 8). As Satan is "the father of lies" (St. John viii. 44), Jesus Christ is the Truth; to follow Him is to be delivered from falseness and unreality. There was no sin that he denounced so sternly as the sin of hypocrisy, for sincerity is the first qualification for discipleship. "They are without blemish" (1 St. Peter i. 19). The word is used in the Old Testament for sacrificial offerings (Exod. xii. 5). So the Church is presented to God as a Church "holy and without blemish" through the cleansing power of the sacrifice of Christ. Lastly, the Church is the "firstfruits" of the redeemed creation (St. James i. 18); or perhaps more definitely, of all the generations of Christians who should follow till the end of time—the beginning of the harvest for which God has paid so great a price (Isa. liii. 11).

XXX.—THE THREE ANGELS OF JUDGMENT

(xiv. 6–12)

BETWEEN the worshippers of the beast on one side and the followers of the Lamb on the other, the seer thinks of the great mass of men that

have not yet committed themselves. To them come three last warnings before the great struggle begins. The first is an appeal to the teaching of nature, the second to the teaching of history, the third to the moral law of retribution. They represent the challenge of natural religion (cp. Rom. i. 18–20).

The First Angel

Like the eagle in ch. viii. 13, the angel is pictured as flying in mid-heaven, visible to all the dwellers on the earth. The gospel that he proclaims is the gospel of judgment. The news that God is about to vindicate the cause of righteousness is good news to those who love righteousness, but evil tidings to those who desire evil rather than good. It is an "eternal" gospel because it is an appeal from the shifting moral standards of the world to the permanent moral standard of God. Perhaps the writer is thinking of our Lord's words in St. Matt. xxiv. 14. It is proclaimed over "them that dwell on the earth." The contrast is suggested between *katoikein* (to settle down) and *paroikein* (to pass through). The Christian is a visitor (*paroikos*) on the earth (1 St. Peter ii. 11); he must not "settle down" as though it were his home. The use of *epi* with the accusative suggests that the proclamation is not addressed *to* the heathen world, but rather over it. It is the echo of the song of ch. iv. 11—the adoration of God as Creator—not the new song of ch. v. 9. The Christian revelation assumes the earlier revelation of God in creation.

The Second Angel

Like birds across the sky, the angels of judgment follow one another, each with his special message.

The message of the second angel is from Isa. xxi. 9. As we shall see later (ch. xvii. 5), Babylon is the persecuting Roman Empire. But the name is used here in a wider sense. The historic Babylon, whose fall was the deliverance of the exiled people of God, is a symbol of world-power setting itself against God. Babylon falls whenever the empire of brute force is broken. So the angel-message is an assurance that no kingdom that sets itself against God can stand. As ancient Babylon fell, so Rome shall fall. Three characteristics of the world-empire of darkness are noted; it is a kingdom of force, tyrannising over the nations; a kingdom of wrath; a kingdom of apostasy from God (fornication). The true kingdom is a kingdom of fellowship, of love, of loyalty to God.

The Third Angel

The third angel brings a tremendous warning against apostasy. Notice the seven cups—the cup of trembling (Isa. li. 22), the cup of wrath (Psalm lxxv. 8), the cup of salvation (Psalm cxvi. 13), the cup of service (St. Matt. x. 42), the cup of suffering (St. Matt. xx. 22), the cup of the new covenant (1 Cor. xi. 25), the cup of blessing (1 Cor. x. 16). He who spurns the cup of fellowship through the blood of Christ must drink the cup of the wrath of God. We must not treat the dreadful symbolism of these verses as mere rhetoric; the apostasy that turns from the truth to identify itself with evil dooms itself to the torment of eternal remorse (Heb. vi. 7; x. 26–29).

A Message of Comfort

To the world the day of divine judgment is dreadful, but to the saints, who through suffering

and persecution have kept faithful to God and the cause of Jesus, the message that the long struggle is over is a message of gladness (ch. vi. 10). So a voice from heaven tells of the blessedness of the dead that die in the Lord, and the inner voice of the Spirit explains the message. Why "from henceforth"? Various explanations of the word have been given. Probably the meaning is that since Christ has conquered death in His resurrection, death is no longer dreadful (1 Cor. xv. 57). Notice the twofold contrast. The worshippers of the beast "have no rest day or night"; but the blessed dead "rest from their labours"; the works of darkness perish; but the works of the blessed dead "follow with them" (1 Cor. xv. 58); that is, the righteous carry with them into the eternal world the harvest of their earthly life. Shakespeare's Anthony says: "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." But the writer here says: "Evil perishes; it is only good that endures." In the Kingdom of God "there shall never be one lost good."

XXXI.—THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE

(xiv. 14–20)

THE three messages of warning are followed by two visions of judgment. The harvest of the earth is reaped by the Son of Man; the vintage of wrath by "another angel" with a sharp sickle. The two reapings are clearly meant to be distinct; the first is the harvest of which our Lord spoke (St. Matt. xiii. 39)—the gathering of the wheat into the garner; the other is the harvest of the "vine

of the earth," to be trodden in the wine-press of the wrath of God.

The Divine Reaper and the Harvest

The Son of Man appears, seated on a white cloud (Dan. vii. 13)—not the dark storm-cloud of judgment, but the white cloud of glory (cp. ch. ii. 17; iii. 4; vi. 2). He is crowned with a golden wreath (*stephanos*) of victory, as once He was crowned with the thorn-wreath of suffering. He is armed, not with the sword that slays, but with the sickle that reaps. But the Divine Reaper awaits the appointed hour (St. Mark xiii. 32); from the inner sanctuary an angel-messenger comes forth to announce that the time ordained in the counsels of God has arrived—"the hour to reap is come." In our Lord's first parable the Son of Man is pictured as going forth to sow His seed; now the harvest is fully ripe (not "over-ripe," as in the Revised Version), and He who sowed the seed must reap the harvest. The process of the reaping is not described; the casting of the sickle of the earth is a symbolical act. In St. Matt. xiii. 41 the angels are the agents of the Son of Man in the gathering of the harvest.

The Angel Reaper and the Vintage

In the Jewish year seven weeks intervened between the offering of the firstfruits at the Passover and the Feast of Weeks that followed the gathering in of the wheat-harvest. Four months later the Feast of Tabernacles marked the end of the gathering of the vintage (Deut. xvi. 9, 13). So here the vintage must be gathered before the great Feast of Tabernacles can begin. It is

significant that the Son of Man is not represented as gathering the harvest of wrath; He came not to destroy, but to save. So an angel appears, coming forth from the sanctuary—from the inner Presence of God—armed, like the Son of Man, with a sharp sickle. It is not Christ who condemns the world, but the world that condemns itself.

The reaper-angel waits for the commission to reap, and the angel who brings it comes out of the altar—probably the great altar of burnt offering standing before the holy place, from which the souls of the saints are pictured in ch. vi. 9, as crying to God for judgment. The appearance of the angel, whose charge it was to guard the fire on the altar (ch. viii. 5), is the answer to their prayer.

The idea of the vintage as a symbol of judgment is familiar in the prophets (Joel iii. 13; Isa. lxiii. 2). Wine is a symbol of blood, both in its atoning efficiency (St. Luke xxii. 20) and in its sterner aspect as the expression of slaughter. The angel is pictured as gathering the *vine;* perhaps the writer means that instead of gathering bunches of grapes, the whole vine is torn up and cast into the wine-press, no root being left to bear fruit in after years. The judgment is final. The treading of the wine-press is pictured as taking place "without the city" (cp. Heb. xiii. 12); since naught that defileth can enter through the gates. Dr. Swete thinks that there may be a reference to the situation of the king's wine-presses on the slopes of the Mount of Olives (Zech. xiv. 10).

Is there any special meaning in the two details that are added? With the first compare Enoch i. 3: "The horses shall walk up to the breast in the blood of sinners." The mention of horses points

on to ch. xix., where the wine-press appears again. The idea that the writer wishes to convey is the vast scale of the judgment that floods the earth, not with water, but with blood. But why "a thousand and six hundred furlongs"? Not, as has sometimes been suggested, because this is approximately the distance from Dan to Beersheba. As always in this Book, the number is symbolical. Four is the number of the earth (so in ch. vii. 1, "The four corners of the earth"), and ten the number of human completeness (in contrast with three and seven, both of which belong to the heavenly order). So four times ten, multiplied by itself, expresses the world-wide extension of the judgment. No part of the earth is untouched by it, except the Holy City, within which the harvest of the "sons of the kingdom" has been safely gathered before the final judgment falls on the doomed world.

XXXII.—THE SEVEN ANGELS WITH THE LAST PLAGUES

(xv. 1–8)

THE writer has described the drama of human history in three groups of symbols, each ending with the final judgment (ch. v. 1–vi. 17; vii. 1–xi. 19; xii. 1–xiv. 29). A fourth series now begins (xv. 1–xvi. 21). The scene is again in heaven, where the final judgment is being prepared. A new company now form the foreground of the picture—the martyrs who have come forth victorious from the conflict with the wild beast, who have neither submitted to his authority nor worshipped his image, nor received his name. The sea of glass on (not "by") which they stand, as in ch. iv. 6,

is now shot with fire—the fire of the impending judgment of God (Heb. xii. 29). Like the elders in ch. v. 8, and the 144,000 in ch. xiv. 2, they have harps or zitherns, supplied by God Himself. Whether they are the same company as in ch. vii. 9–17 is not clear. It is more likely that the writer is thinking there of the whole company of the redeemed, here of the victors in the particular struggle with Roman Imperialism that he saw approaching.

The Song of the Victors

The song is described as the Song of Moses. The reference is clearly to Exod. xv. 1, the deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh being regarded as typical of the victory of the children of God over the forces of evil. But it is also the Song of the Lamb, for it was through the blood of the Lamb that they overcame (ch. xii. 11). The song is a collection of phrases from the Old Testament. It celebrates God as the All-ruling Lord of nature, as the Righteous King of the ages of history (or " of the nations," the reading is uncertain), as the Holy One whose name awakens fear and praise, and finally as the Judge who has vindicated the cause of righteousness before the nations (cp. 1 Tim. i. 17). It is significant that the martyrs are represented as absorbed in the thought of the glory of God. They have forgotten their own victory in the greater glory of the divine victory.

The Seven Angels

The earthly tabernacle was a copy of the true tabernacle in heaven (Heb. viii. 5). As in ch. xi. 19, the veil that conceals the inner sanctuary is drawn aside, and from the immediate presence of

God the seven angels with the seven last plagues come forth to execute His purpose. They are arrayed in glistening white linen (the alternative reading, *Lithon*, adopted in Revised Version, gives a rather strained sense) and girded with the golden girdle of the priestly office (cp. ch. i. 13). They are the ministers, not of mere vengeance, but of the stern justice that is the counterpart of the divine love. "There is nothing in prophetic imagery more striking than this picture of the Seven Angels issuing, in solemn procession, from the sanctuary" (Lee). One of the four living creatures, the symbols of creation restored to the worship and service of God, delivers to the angels the bowls from which the punishment of God is to be poured out on the apostate earth. These bowls were the shallow basins in which incense was carried (see ch. v. 8); now they are devoted to another purpose (cp. ch. viii. 3, 5, where the golden censer has the same twofold purpose). They were also used as drinking-vessels (Amos vi. 6), and so they suggest the idea of the wine of the divine wrath outpoured (Psalm lxxix. 6; ch. xiv. 10). The phrase, "the living God," recalls Heb. x. 31.

As in Isaiah's vision (Isa. vi. 4), a cloud of smoke veils the sanctuary and expresses the glory and power of God. Perhaps the writer is thinking of the pillar of cloud that led the march of Israel and interposed between them and the hosts of Egypt (Exod. xiv. 20)—bright with divine glory on the side that faced the chosen people, but dark with impending judgment on the side that faced their enemies. So at Sinai, when the law was given, the mountain was shrouded in smoke (Exod. xix. 18; Heb. xii. 18). "And no one was able to

enter the sanctuary." Cp. Exod. xl. 34; 1 Kings viii. 10. The judgments of God are inscrutable; they belong to the mystery of the divine purpose into which even angels may not enter. Only when the judgment is complete will the cloud be lifted and the glory and power of God manifested. Till then "clouds and darkness are round about Him." But behind the cloud is the brightness of Infinite Love.

XXXIII.—THE FIRST FOUR BOWLS

(xvi. 1–9)

THE writer has already suggested the comparison between the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the victory of the Church over the wild beast. The plagues of Egypt are present in his mind as he describes the seven last plagues. But there are two differences. The plagues of Egypt were the means of Israel's deliverance, but here the Church, the true Israel, is already set free from the power of the wild beast, and is safe in the presence of God. Again, the plagues of Egypt follow in sequence, but here the pouring out of the bowls is almost simultaneous, and the seven last plagues form a culmination of disasters falling on a doomed world.

The First Three Plagues

The great voice from the sanctuary is apparently the voice of God Himself, charging each of the angels to go to his appointed station. The judgments that follow are all, except the last, poured out on the subjects of the anti-Christian Empire. They are the disasters recognised in the prophets as signs

of divine retribution—disease, famine, great heat, darkness, war and earthquake. The first is suggested by the sixth plague (Exod. ix. 8–12). The Kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of healing; so the kingdom of Antichrist becomes a kingdom of foul disease. Perhaps the writer means to suggest a comparison between the disease that smote the magicians of Egypt and the plague that fell upon a kingdom founded on magic (ch. xiii. 13). The second and third plagues (cp. Exod. vii. 20; ch. viii. 8) are probably separated because they represent the destruction of human resources in two ways. The sea becomes blood—not blood as the symbol of life, but as the symbol of corruption ("like the blood of a corpse"), and all living things in the sea die—one of the sources of human food is destroyed. Then the streams and fountains are polluted so that men cannot drink of them (Psalm lxxviii. 44).

The Angel of the Waters

The angels of the winds appear in ch. vii. 1, and the angel of fire in ch. xiv. 18. For "power over the waters," see ch. xi. 6. Here the angel of the waters, whose task is finished now that they have become blood, affirms the justice of the divine judgments. The words celebrate three attributes of God—His righteousness, His eternity ("who art and wast"), and His holiness—and recognise the vindication of the divine law of retribution (St. Matt. vii. 2). They who thirsted for the blood of the saints are now condemned to drink blood. The altar from beneath which the saints cried to God for the vindication of their cause (ch. vi. 10) is now satisfied, and responds to the

angel's cry. So the spiritual world recognises the justice of the divine judgment.

The Fourth Plague

This plague has no counterpart in the Egyptian series, but is naturally suggested by the blazing heat of an Eastern summer. The definite article with "men" suggests that the men intended are those who worshipped the wild beast (verse 2). The horror of the picture is increased by the fact that the stricken multitude recognises whose hand has smitten them. Impotent before the divine judgment, they only blaspheme the name of God. The opportunity for repentance is over.

Some general remarks seem to be needed with regard to the appalling picture of judgment presented in this chapter. The underlying thought is that the powers of nature and the organised forces of human society revolt at last against serving any longer the apostate world that has defied God. Creation rebels against the men who have rebelled against its Creator. Men misuse the resources that God has placed under their control till at last "that which should have been for their health" becomes to them an occasion of falling. The bowls are not poured out on men, but on the world of nature—the earth, the sea, the sun—and on the seat of government and the frontier of the Empire. There is a kind of reversal, in these bowls of judgment, of the process of creation, beginning with the earth, the sea, the sun, and ending with the general chaos of the whole ordered system of the world. The highly coloured, apocalyptic language thus represents a deep truth—that when men defy God they are turning the world back towards chaos. The

long-suffering of God has its limits ; He bears long with human sin (2 St. Peter iii. 9) ; but " My Spirit shall not strive with man for ever " (Rom. i. 24). " It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you " (2 Thess. i. 6).

XXXIV.—THE LAST THREE PLAGUES

(xvi. 10–21)

THE first four plagues affect the physical world ; the next two represent the break-up of the organised fabric of human civilisation in darkness and universal war, and the last shows us a world dissolving in chaos. It is the Roman Empire that the writer has in view throughout. At the end of the first century earthquakes, pestilences, and threats of barbarian invasion seemed to portend the fall of the Empire. It rallied in the following century and held together long enough to lay aside the policy of persecution and become, in name at least, Christian. In as far as it ceased to be the kingdom of the wild beast, its doom was averted for a time. But the principle that the author of the Apocalypse asserted—that a kingdom that defies God must ultimately perish—remains true.

The Fifth Bowl

At the time when the Apocalypse was written the throne of the wild beast was in Rome, as in ancient times it had been in Babylon or Nineveh. Apostate Imperialism will generally find a local centre. Would it be wholly untrue to say that to-day it is Berlin, whence issues the practical repudiation of the principles of Christianity—the worship of the " God of Forces " (Dan. xi. 38) ?

The prophets picture the Gentile world as plagued with darkness (Isa. v. 30 ; lx. 2). No image could better express the disorder and confusion of a dissolving society.

The Sixth Bowl

As in ch. ix. 14, the Eastern frontier of the Empire is now thrown open to hostile invasion. Some commentators have supposed that the " Kings of the East " were the Jewish exiles, now to be restored to their own land. But the restoration of the Jews does not come within the range of the writer's visions, and the Kings of the East are the harbingers of the final war of the nations. It was from the East that Rome most dreaded barbarian invasions, and according to a legend current in Asia (referred to in the Sibylline Oracles) Nero would return at the head of a Parthian host to overwhelm the Empire. It is possible that the writer has in mind the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, when, according to Herodotus, he deflected the course of the Euphrates and marched over the dried river-bed. Barbarian invasion from the East now opens the great world-war. Evil spirits from the trinity of evil (the association of false religion with impurity justifies the identification of the wild beast, the false prophet and the dragon with the world, the flesh and the devil) go forth to deceive the nations. Their frog-like appearance is doubtless suggested by Exod. viii. 1–14. It also conveys the idea of their repulsiveness. We need not adopt the " pacifist " position in order to recognise that war is the outcome of evil—the result of worldly ambition, material greed, and deliberate savagery. Aggression must be resisted, but the nation that glorifies

war has sold itself to the powers of evil. War only ceases to degrade when we hate it with all our hearts.

The plain of Esdraelon, or Megiddo, was one of the great battle-grounds of Palestine (Judges iv.; 1 Sam. xxxi.; 2 Kings xxiii. 29). It was the natural meeting-place of armies from North and South. So here the writer sees the nations gather for the last great war. We must not identify this war with that of ch. xvii.; xix. 19. It is not suggested here that the nations are gathered to defy God; it is rather the final fulfilment of St. Matt. xxiv. 7.

The writer interposes the warning of Christ (St. Matt. xxiv. 42, 43); in the great day of battle men may forget the spiritual forces that are working out the purpose of God, and so be put to shame when the Lord comes.

The Seventh Bowl

The last bowl is poured out into the air; it is universal in its scope. In apocalyptic language the writer describes the dissolution of human civilisation. It is not the "end of the world" (for verse 20 must be regarded as a symbolical expression of the sweeping away of established institutions), since men are still left to blaspheme God. But the Empire of Darkness has fallen; the Great City is rent by earthquake (cp. Zech. xiv. 4–5), and the Cities of the Nations are shattered. Men are left unsheltered to face the judgment of God. Only the City of God endures (Heb. xii. 27–28).

XXXV.—THE ANTI-CHRISTIAN WORLD-EMPIRE

(xvii. 1–18)

THE seventh trumpet is followed by the vision of the woman clothed with the sun; so the seventh bowl is followed by the vision of another woman arrayed in purple and scarlet. Before we attempt to interpret this vision, we must consider the picture of the wild beast on which she is represented as sitting. It is the same wild beast as in ch. xiii., but its history is more fully described.

The Wild Beast

The beast is royal scarlet in colour, full of names of blasphemy. The seven heads and ten horns reappear. Some further details are added by the angel-interpreter. The enigmatic phrase three times repeated—"Which was and is not"—seems an intentional contrast to the phrase of ch. i. 4—"Which is and Which was." In contrast with the never-dying life of God, the world-empire is constantly passing away, to be reborn in new forms which in their turn perish. A new manifestation of the world-power was just beginning. The wild beast was about to rise again from the abyss and find a fresh incarnation in the Roman Empire, winning the admiration of all the dwellers on the earth.

We must not pass over the remarkable phrase, "Written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world" (cp. ch. xiii. 8, where the words should probably be taken with "written," and not with "the Lamb slain"). The thought recalls St. Matt. xxv. 34; Eph. i. 4. It must be connected with ch. iii. 5. Names written in the Book of Life

may be blotted out; divine election does not supersede human power of choice.

The Seven Heads

As in ch. xiii. 18, attention is called to the fact that the explanation offered is itself a mystery, but a mystery that the understanding mind will know how to interpret. It can hardly be doubted that the writer is thinking of the seven hills of Rome, but these seven hills become themselves symbols. They represent seven kingdoms in which the life of the wild beast has found, or will find, expression. The effort to identify these seven "kings" with successive emperors is not very convincing. It seems far more likely that the writer is thinking of the great world-empires that have sought to dominate the world. The five that are fallen would then be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece (cp. Dan. vii.). The sixth is the existing Roman Empire. But the writer foresees the rise of a seventh world-empire destined to a life of some duration before the end comes. And behind all these empires, as the inspiring influence of them all, coming of the seven, and going into perdition, is the spirit of anti-Christian world-power of which they are the historic embodiments.

The Ten Horns

Ten is the number of human completeness. The writer seems to foresee the dismemberment of the Empire and the rise of a group of states wholly devoted to the ideals of godless imperialism. After a brief hour of prosperity they make war on the Lamb and His chosen warriors, and are vanquished. Then they turn upon the harlot and destroy her.

How are we to interpret these enigmatic predictions? To what historic events do they refer? Perhaps the true answer is that the writer is occupied less with predicting events than with recognising principles. His special purpose appears to be to explain that as there have been successive empires in the past that have set themselves to defy the purpose of God, so the Roman Empire will not be the last. In new forms the world-empire of darkness will still defy God. It was not an easy triumph to which the Church was to look forward, but stern endurance through ages of history. Victory was certain in the end; the wild beast was doomed to perdition at the appointed time; and throughout the long struggle God was over-ruling the course of human history. The kingdoms of the world were unconsciously fulfilling His purpose (Acts iv. 28). It was this belief that the drama of world history was the working out, even in its darkest hours, of the unchanging purpose of God that constituted the greatness of apocalyptic literature. "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men." Brute empires might triumph for a little while, but "he that endureth to the end" should be saved. Without this assurance the Church could never have lived through the long struggle against the empire which had just begun when the Book of Revelation was written.

XXXVI.—BABYLON THE GREAT

(xvii. 1–18)

THE wild beast is the world-empire of brute force that sets itself against God. What, then, is the harlot-city, whose splendour and doom form

the theme of this and the next chapter? Just as the woman in ch. xii. is the ideal Church, the divine society that from the beginning of human history has served and suffered for God, so the great harlot is apostate humanity—what St. John calls "the world"—that is, human society organised without God. Rome was not only the centre of world-power, it was also the centre of world-religion. To it gravitated every strange cult from the East. In ch. xiii. the second beast, or false prophet (xix. 20) is the servant of anti-Christian Imperialism, but here the parts are reversed—the woman is seated on the wild beast. World-power has been subdued to the service of apostate religion.

The Triumph of the Harlot-City

The world is represented here under two images —as a harlot and as a city. Fornication is frequently used in the prophets to describe spiritual apostasy. Tyre is described as a harlot in Isa. xxiii. 15–17; and Nineveh in Nahum iii. 4. See also 2 Kings ix. 22. The spirit of false religion is represented as "sitting on many waters" (Jer. li. 13), implying its wide-extended influence (verse 15). It is decked in the splendour of royal colours and jewels. As the high priest bore on his forehead the mysterious name of God (Exod. xxviii. 36), so the high priestess of evil bears on her forehead the mysterious name that sums up her character. Cp. "the mystery of iniquity" in 2 Thess. ii. 7.

The use of Babylon to describe Rome, considered as the centre of heathen world-empire, was inherited from Jewish apocalyptic literature. It is almost certain that Babylon in 1 St. Peter v. 13 is Rome. As the centre of brute strength Rome

was, at the time when the Apocalypse was written, the representative of the wild beast ; as the centre of all the spiritual wickedness of the world it was the representative of all the cruelty and hatred of good of which the historic Babylon was, to the prophets, the great expression.

The Doom of the Harlot-City

The alliance between false religion and world-power goes on till the defeat of the world-rulers in their last assault on the Lamb. Then they turn against the harlot-city and destroy her with savage ferocity. Dr. Milligan suggests that the writer may have had in mind the alliance of degenerate Judaism with the Roman power for the destruction of the " Lamb of God," who overcame them when He rose again from the dead. Then the unholy alliance was dissolved, and the Roman armies destroyed the city that had rejected its Lord. It is a similar alliance that he foresees, and a similar destruction by the world-power of the false religion that has lured it with lying words to the disastrous conflict with the Lamb. A religion that tries to use the power of secular authority for its own ends will, sooner or later, have to pay the price when the secular authority turns against it.

Is the Scarlet Woman Papal Rome ?

The identification of the harlot-city of this chapter with papal Rome became a commonplace of Reformation controversy. Several features of the description undoubtedly correspond to characteristics of papal policy—for example, its use of secular authority to enforce its supremacy ; its use of the weapon of persecution—to the reformers

papal Rome seemed "drunk with the blood of the saints"; its outward splendour and shameless greed; its misfortunes when emperor or king "made her desolate and naked." But papal Rome, even in its darkest days, was never apostate; if it persecuted the saints, it also produced them; it was not the enemy of Christianity, however imperfectly it represented the Christian ideal. What the writer foresaw was something much more avowedly and openly anti-Christian, the first signs of which he could see in the rallying of ancient paganism, degenerate Judaism, and strange Eastern cults to the support of the Imperial policy of persecution. Out of this seething world of superstition and idolatry he builds up the vision of the harlot-city, the tyrant and corrupter of the world. The description of the doom of the harlot is based on Ezek. xvi. 35–41. The denunciation of apostate Jerusalem becomes a denunciation of world-apostasy.

XXXVII.—BABYLON IS FALLEN

(xviii.)

THE literary power of the Apocalypse reaches its high-water mark in this chapter. In the previous chapter the harlot-city is the symbol of the spiritual apostasy that had its contemporary centre of Rome; but in this chapter the writer definitely identifies Babylon with Rome, the superstition and luxury of which he denounces in language borrowed from the prophetic denunciations of Tyre or Babylon.

The Angel of Judgment

This is the second of a group of three angels (cp. ch. xiv.). His description of Babylon is prophetic,

and he has "great authority" to carry his prediction into execution. The picture of desolation recalls Isa. xiii. 19–22; xxxiv. 14; Jer. li. 37. Rome is denounced as corrupting the world with its degenerate religion and shameless luxury. Its political and social life were alike degraded by the spiritual apostasy that lay behind them (Rom. i. 21). The contrast between the city thronged by kings and traders and the ruins haunted by demons and unclean spirits and obscene birds of prey is very striking.

The Voice from Heaven

As generally in this book, the voice from Heaven interprets the events that are in progress. Here it gives expression to a command, a sentence, a prediction, and finally a shout of triumph.

The command to the people of God to come out of the doomed city is an echo of the appeals of the prophets (Isa. xlviii. 20; Jer. li. 45, etc.). See also Gen. xii. 1; xix. 12. Here it is a warning to the Church to dissociate itself from the godless and dissolute life of the Empire (2 Cor. vi. 17) lest she be involved in its destruction. Then follows the solemn sentence addressed to the ministers of the divine vengeance. The law of retaliation (St. Matt. vii. 2) belongs to the divine government of the world. It is the expression, not of vindictiveness, but of even-handed justice.

> "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us."
>
> —"King Lear."

The sentence of doom is followed by a prediction of the lamentations of those who have trafficked with the city over its doom. Here the writer has

in mind the great dirge over Tyre in Ezek. xxvii. He represents three classes of men as lamenting over the doomed city—the kings of the earth who have been corrupted by its superstitions, the merchants who have ministered to its luxury, and the seafaring men who have been enriched by its trade. The picture of the various forms of trade that poured into Rome is a striking one, ending with the traffic in the bodies and in the souls of men.

In contrast with the laments of men, the saints and apostles and prophets are invited to be glad over the doom of the city that had set itself to destroy them. The apostles and prophets, as the two highest orders of the Christian ministry (Eph. iv. 11), represent the organised life of the Church, which is called to rejoice in the manifestation of the divine justice.

The Dirge of the Angel

The action of the angel is suggested by Jer. li. 61–64. The great stone sinking in the sea vividly suggests the irrevocable doom of the apostate city. The dirge that follows is full of echoes from the prophets. It depicts the complete end of art and craftsmanship, and industry and social and domestic life. The cause of the doom of the city closes the dirge. It had given itself to materialism —"thy merchants were the princes of the earth" —and to degrading forms of false religion—"all nations were deceived with thy sorcery." The final verdict lays on the city the blood of prophets and saints (cp. St. Matt. xxiii. 35). Rome, like Jerusalem, had identified itself with the effort to stamp out in blood the testimony of those who witnessed for God. So the last count in the

indictment is that, loving falsehood, Babylon has tried to suppress truth.

History knows of no such dramatic fall of Rome as is here pictured. But the truth that underlies the apocalyptic imagery—that whatever sets itself against God must come to destruction—is a permanent truth of history.

XXXVIII.—THE PRAISE OF HEAVEN

(xix. 1-7)

WITH the lamentations of the world over the fall of the harlot-city fresh in his ears, the seer is caught up once more into heaven, which is ringing with the song of triumph. He sees again the great multitude, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. While the human society on earth is dissolving in chaos the divine society in heaven remains unchanged. The storm rages below, but the upper sky is clear.

The Song of the Multitude in Heaven

Three Hebrew words—Alleluia, Hosanna, and Amen—have been incorporated into the worship of the Church. Hallelujah ("Praise ye Yahwe") occurs frequently in the Psalms as a closing refrain. In its Greek form it occurs here four times, and nowhere else in the New Testament. It is a fitting introduction to the threefold doxology that follows. "Salvation and glory and power are (attributes) of our God." God manifests Himself as the author of all salvation; as the source of all moral beauty; as the centre of all power. The harlot-city had claimed to rival the salvation, the glory, and the power of God, and its fall was a threefold vindication

of His supremacy. May we not see in this threefold ascription of praise a suggestion of the triune Being of God—power represented in the Divine Fatherhood, salvation in the Son, and glory in the Holy Spirit? And these three are one, for power manifests its glory in salvation.

The triumph of the great multitude (ch. vii. 9) over the vindication of the cause of truth and righteousness represents the instinctive human craving for justice which finds degraded expression in the spirit of revenge. Indignant protest against wrong and injustice is as truly part of the Christian spirit as is the love that desires to forgive. It is only when we take the task of vengeance into our own hands that we become entangled in the world's way (Rom. xii. 19; Heb. x. 30). As the song closes with a second Alleluia the seer sees the smoke from the embers of the burning city going up as a kind of incense of judgment from the earth below (Isa. xxxiv. 9).

The Adoration of the Elders

The elders and the four living creatures again fall down and worship Him that sat on the throne (ch. iv. 9; v. 8). Amen ("so it is") was used in the synagogue services as the response of the people at the end of the prayers and doxologies, and it was adopted by the Christian Church (1 Cor. xiv. 16). It was used by our Lord as a solemn affirmation of the truth of His sayings: "Verily, verily I say unto you" (*amen, amen, lego*). Here the inner company of the elders and cherubim affirm the truth of the threefold doxology and associate themselves with the praises of the great multitude (cp. ch. v. 14).

The Praise of the Multitude on Earth

The voice from the throne calls the whole company of the faithful on earth to join in the praise of heaven (Psalm cxxxv. 1, 20). Outside the world-empire on which the doom of God has fallen are the people that have not joined in the great apostasy (see ch. xi. 18), and to whom the fall of the harlot-city has brought deliverance from oppression. So from the earth below there rolls up the thunder of a second great multitude praising God for the vindication of His authority. The word translated "omnipotent" means "all-ruling" rather than merely all-powerful. "The title is not descriptive of abstract power, but of exercised dominion" (Westcott). All things are subject to the authority of God. If they accept that authority, they live; if, like the harlot-city, they defy it, they perish. So joy and gladness come back to the stricken earth as it recognises the coming of its true King. The vindication of the Divine Sovereignty, manifested in history, is the purpose of all apocalyptic writings (Dan. iv. 17; vii. 27). Babylon may claim authority over the nations, but it is a usurped authority; the only kingdom that lasts is the Kingdom of God. The Authorised Version omits the significant word "our." Because He is our God we rejoice in the establishment of His Kingdom. So our Creed begins: "I believe in God the Father All-sovereign."

XXXIX.—THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

(xix. 7–10)

THE great event for which all history has been preparing now draws near, heralded by the

praises of the great multitude. All creation has been "waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 19), for the completion of the redemption that was the purpose of God before the foundation of the world. The idea of a marriage between God and His people was constantly present in the mind of the prophets (see *e.g.* Isa. liv. 5; Jer. iii. 14, etc.). The closest bond in which love binds human lives together seemed the least inadequate symbol of the eternal union in which God unites redeemed humanity to Himself. The symbol is taken over by the New Testament writers (St. John iii. 29; 2 Cor. xi. 2; Eph. v. 25), who see in the sacrifice of Christ the perfect example of the love that expresses itself by what it gives.

The Bride

The Church is the bride of Christ, bought back from the service of sin by His blood "that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church." St. Paul represents the making ready of the bride as the work of Christ; whereas here it is the bride who "hath made herself ready." The two thoughts are really complementary. It is Christ, by His Spirit, Who purifies and prepares the Church; but the Church is not merely passive, it can respond to or reject the call of the Spirit. The right to array herself in a shining and spotless robe of fine linen is "given unto her" by divine grace. This fine linen may perhaps be intended to suggest the priestly office of the Church (Exod. xxviii. 6, 8; Ezek. xliv. 17). So, like the priest of the Psalmist's prayer, she is "clothed with righteousness" (cp. Job xxix. 14). In Isa. xlix. 18, Zion is represented as clothing herself with her children, as a bride. So here the

whole Catholic Church is pictured as glorified by the righteous acts of its members, as it is put to shame by their unworthiness. We receive the gift of holiness from the Spirit of Christ; but we receive it, not as a personal possession, but as an endowment that we can bring to the great society to which we belong. We are "members of His Body"—sharers in a common life.

The Marriage Feast

The angel-guide bids the seer add another beatitude, and, as in ch. xiv. 13, the promise is confirmed by a solemn attestation: "These are the true words of God." The idea of a festival of gladness beyond the conflict and suffering is suggested by our Lord's words in St. Matt. xxvi. 29. But who are "they which are bidden"? Perhaps the writer has in mind the parable of the Marriage Feast (St. Matt. xxii.), and the guests who did not recognise the blessedness of the invitation. Here the members of the Church are called to realise the blessedness that awaits them when the purpose of God is complete and the Eucharist of sacrifice becomes the Eucharist of gladness. Collectively, the whole body of Christian people form the bride; but each has his own place in the great reunion, when redeemed humanity enters on the life of fellowship and gladness for which it was created.

Worship and Service

The worship of angels (Col. ii. 18) was one of the errors into which the Asiatic Churches had fallen. Christian thought has not always found it easy to retain the distinction between the adoration that is due to God alone and the reverence shown to

human superiors or to supernatural beings. The distinction lies in the title that the angel claims for himself. As "fellow-servants," we all owe allegiance to the same Master (St. Matt. xxiii. 8–10); we must not give to created beings that honour that belongs to Him alone (see Col. i. 15–18). Contrast the instant refusal of the angel to receive the worship of the seer with the acceptance by Jesus Christ of the worship of His disciples. Why could He accept what the angel refused? Because "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." When we offer our adoration to Jesus Christ we are adoring "God manifest in the flesh."

Angels and men are fellow-servants because they bear witness to Jesus. The writer adds a note to explain that the spirit of prophecy (which he claimed to possess) shows itself in its witness to Jesus (cp. 1 St. John iv. 2). The spirit of prophecy was the endowment promised to all believers in the new dispensation (Acts ii. 17). For all believers were called to the task of witness, in which we are fellow-servants with the angels—the "ministering spirits" of God.

XL.—THE CONQUERING CHRIST

(xix. 11–21)

THE bridegroom and the warrior! The guests called to the marriage feast and the birds of prey called to the feast of carnage! Divine love has these two aspects. It is gentle, tender, forgiving, filling the hungry with good things, exalting the humble and meek. But it has another aspect; it is stern, implacable, fiery, putting down the mighty from their seats. The Christianity that ignores

this side of the character of Christ becomes effeminate and invertebrate. We are not only the servants of Jesus Christ, but His soldiers. We are called to the battle as well as to the banquet (Eph. vi. 12).

The Divine Warrior

The long patience of God is over, and He Who died to save the world now rides forth to destroy the forces of evil. He is seated on a white horse, the symbol of victory (ch. vi. 2), and He has four names. His first name is Faithful and True (ch. iii. 14; Isa. xxv. 1). And as unrighteousness is compounded of hypocrisy and untrustworthiness, so faithfulness and truth find expression in righteousness (Isa. xi. 5). His second name is known to Himself alone (ch. ii. 17). Several times in the Old Testament spiritual beings refuse to reveal their name (Gen. xxxii. 29; Judges xiii. 18), for in Hebrew thought the name is the expression of the personality. "No one knoweth the Son save the Father." He Who on earth bore the name of Jesus has a name that is above every name (Phil. ii. 9; Eph. i. 21), a glory that human eyes cannot see or human minds understand. His third name is "The Word of God." In Heb. iv. 12 and in Eph. vi. 17 the Word of God is pictured as a sword, and in the former passage it is depicted as a living thing—"a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Here the Word is more directly a personal name—the final revelation of God is His complete Word, the full expression of His whole Being (St. John i. 1; 1 St. John i. 1). His last name is the expression of His relation to humanity, as His third is the expression of His relation to God. He is "King

of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. vi. 15, ch. xvii. 14), and therefore He wears many crowns.

The other features of the Divine Warrior express the stern judgment that He comes to execute —His eyes as a flame of fire (ch. i. 14) piercing through the hypocrisies of men; His vesture dipped in blood, as in Isaiah's vision (Isa. lxiii. 2); a sharp sword going out of His mouth (ch. i. 16; Isa. xi. 4). The idea of the wine-press also takes us back to Isa. lxiii. 3.

The Great Victory

The summons to the birds of prey is derived from Ezek. xxxix. 17–20. The angel stands in the sun that his voice may reach the upper air where the great birds soar. The seer pictures the evil forces of the world gathering in one last futile effort to withstand the oncoming of the armies of heaven. There is no real battle; the beast and the false prophet are seized as they attempt to escape, and their followers mown down by the sword. The fate of the two powers of evil is perhaps suggested by Dan. vii. 11, or by the story of Sodom and Gomorrha (Jude, verse 7). The idea suggested is that of utter destruction. The mention of the false prophet warns us against any attempt to impose a chronological order on the visions of the Apocalypse. For the fall of Babylon and the destruction of the false prophet are pictures of the same event —the sweeping away of the "spiritual wickedness in heavenly places" that used the brute force of Imperialism for its evil purposes. The false prophet is the unholy spirit in the trinity of evil, dwelling in the harlot-city as the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church.

Was the writer thinking of the fate of Balaam, who "loved the wages of unrighteousness" and was slain in the battle that overthrew the kings of Midian, and who had become a symbol of the apostate spirit of Antichrist (2 St. Peter ii. 15; ch. ii. 14)?

We must not interpret this passage as foretelling the literal reappearance of Christ on earth. The struggle is fought out in the spiritual world, and is the spiritual counterpart of the conflict of ch. xvi. 14; xvii. 16. Evil will not always defile the universe; its seeming omnipotence crumbles into impotence when the armies of heaven go forth with the Son of God to the last great struggle against the powers of force and fraud.

XLI.—THE MILLENNIUM

(xx. 3)

BEFORE we attempt to interpret this chapter —the most difficult in the book—it will be necessary to consider the ideas about the millennium that were current at the time when the Apocalypse was written. There is no doubt that the author was familiar with the Jewish apocalyptic ideas of the time, and that his purpose was to give them a Christian interpretation. What were these ideas?

The Prophetic Idea

The prophets believed in the triumph of the people of God over oppression and evil, and the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness and peace (Isa. xl. 9–11; lxv. 17 ff.), over which the Messiah should reign as king (Isa. xi.; Zech. ix. 10). Beyond this they did not look. But later

Jewish thought regarded this Messianic kingdom as leading on to the eternal Kingdom of God in the spiritual world.

Jewish Millenarian Ideas

In the Jewish apocalyptic writers these ideas become more definite. The Messianic kingdom on earth is regarded as lasting for a definite period of time, after which the final judgment of the nations closes world-history, and ushers in the Kingdom of the Heavens. As to the duration of this Messianic kingdom, opinions vary. Some writers suggest four hundred years, probably as corresponding to the four hundred years of oppression in Egypt (Gen. xv. 13), to which Psalm xc. 15 ("Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us") was regarded as referring. But the general opinion seems to have accepted a thousand years as the destined duration of the period. For this there were two reasons. In the Jewish system of numerical symbols, ten expressed earthly completeness (Rev. ii. 10)—so we have ten commandments, ten virgins, ten talents, etc.; and the law of tithe. Hence $10 \times 10 \times 10$ represents the highest form of human completeness. The number 1000 was also suggested by the idea of the Great Week of world-history, to which Psalm xc. 4 was supposed to point (cp. 2 St. Peter iii. 8). According to this view six thousand years of human history would be followed by a great sabbath of a thousand years of rest and blessedness. Sometimes the pictures of this millennial age are grotesque, as in the Apocalypse of Baruch, where the writer describes how every vine will have a thousand branches, every branch a thousand clusters, and every cluster a thousand

grapes—a passage quoted by the early Christian Father, Papias. Some scholars believe that this idea of a thousand years of earthly prosperity found its way into Jewish thought from Persian sources, as it is found in various forms in Zoroastrian writings, but this is doubtful. Whatever the source of this belief may have been, it was certainly widely accepted in Jewish literature in the first century, and influenced Christian thought very deeply.

Christian Millenarian Ideas

The idea of a return of Christ to set up an earthly kingdom was accepted by most of the early Christian Fathers in the West after the middle of the second century, though Justin admits that Christians differed on the subject. The Alexandrian teachers, on the other hand, gave an allegorical interpretation to the passage in the Book of Revelation. The millenarian controversy was connected with doubts as to whether this book should be included in the Bible. The belief in a literal thousand years' reign of Christ on earth was finally abandoned by the main body of Churchmen through the influence of St. Augustine, who, after holding millenarian ideas for a time, came to believe that the earthly reign of Christ began with His first advent, and that the delivery of those who believed on Him from the kingdom of darkness was the "first resurrection." The expectation of a literal reign of Christ on earth revived from time to time, notably in the sixteenth century, but the general opinion of the Christian Church has seen in the millennium a symbolic expression of the spiritual reign of Christ in His Church. How far we are to expect, before the end, such a general recognition throughout the world

of the authority of Christ as seems implied in the picture of the thousand years of peace, is a question about which Christian thinkers differ.

XLII.—THE DOOM OF THE DRAGON

(xx. 1–10)

TWO of the enemies of Christ have already fallen; the doom of the third and greatest is recorded in this chapter. Here, as throughout this book, we are not dealing with events in chronological order, but rather with the drama of human history as seen in the eternal present of God. Satan has already been cast out of heaven (xii. 9; St. Luke x. 18); he is now cast out of his usurped kingdom on earth (St. Luke iv. 6), and then out of his last refuge in the abyss.

The Binding of Satan

In ch. ix. 11 Apollyon is called "the angel of the abyss." It is from the abyss that the powers of darkness come, and to the abyss they return (St. Luke viii. 31). The ancient world thought of the earth as a great plain above which was the upper air, peopled by spirits good and evil (hence "the prince of the power of the air," Eph. ii. 2); and above that again the untroubled region where God reigned; while below the earth was *Sheol*, the place of the dead; and below that again, the dark, mysterious place of infinite depth where evil spirits had their home. The binding of the Dragon recalls our Lord's words in St. Mark iii. 27. The binding of the strong man began when the Resurrection broke the power of Satan (Col. ii. 15) and set free those who were subject to his yoke. If we accept this

interpretation, the thousand years is the whole of the Christian dispensation, conceived of as a complete period, the exact duration of which is known to God alone (St. Mark xiii. 32). By His victory over sin, Jesus Christ set free from the power of evil all who are willing to claim their liberty (Col. i. 13). If any man remains in bondage, it is not because Satan is able to hold him captive, but because he chooses bondage rather then freedom.

The Reign of the Saints

One aspect of the Christian dispensation is the curbing of the power of evil; the other is the enthronement of the saints, not only as subjects in the kingdom, but as sharers in the royal dignity of their Lord (1 Cor. vi. 2; Eph. ii. 6;, 2 Tim. ii. 12). The writer probably has Dan. vii. 22 specially in mind. It is important to notice that the reign of the saints with their Lord is not spoken of as taking place on earth. He hath "made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 6). Through the martyr's death the faithful were set free to enter more fully into "the joy of their Lord." So the seer adds a fifth benediction (two more are to come) on those who have a part in the first Resurrection. Their blessedness is twofold—they are beyond the power of the "second death," and they are priests and kings of God. What is this first Resurrection? We find the answer in Rom. vi. 5; Col. iii. 1, etc. Those who are "risen with Christ" must share the common lot of physical death, but they have already passed from death unto life, and the death beyond death cannot touch them.

The Last Conflict

The third feature of the Christian dispensation is that it closes with a last outbreak of rebellion. The passage here is the only instance in this book of a definite prediction of the future. Our Lord's words in St. Luke xviii. 8 suggest that before the coming of the Son of Man there shall be a world-wide defection (see 2 Thess. ii. 3). The names Gog and Magog appear in Ezek. xxxviii., where they represent wild tribes from the north; in later Jewish writings they become names for the Gentile world, so they are used here for the anti-Christian world gathered by the Dragon for the last attack on "the camp of the saints and the beloved city" —the latter expression is from Ecclus. xxiv. 11 (cp. Psalm lxxviii. 68). As in Ezek. xxxviii. 22, fire destroys the hostile army, but the Dragon is reserved for a more dreadful doom. He is "punished with everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. i. 9), sharing the fate of his evil instruments (ch. xix. 20). How far are we to take these words literally? Is evil indestructible? Perhaps the idea of age-long torment is, like the lake of fire and brimstone, a symbol for some reality that cannot be otherwise expressed. The truth that the writer is concerned to express is that evil is utterly defeated and brought to impotence for ever. Like a man tormented in a lake of fire, the spirit of evil shall be for ever cut off from the life of redeemed humanity, a witness to the inexorable justice that cannot tolerate evil as a permanent fact in the world of reality.

XLIII.—THE LAST JUDGMENT

(xx. 11–14)

THE Jewish apocalyptic writers generally picture the drama of world-history as ending with a final judgment, and our Lord's parables teach the same truth. It is important to remember that the primary function of a judge is not to inflict punishment, but to ascertain the actual facts. When the facts are known the penalty follows, not by the arbitrary decree of the judge, but by the action of law. Properly speaking, it is not the judge that condemns the criminal, but his own misdeeds.

The Divine Judge

The great white throne recalls Dan. vii. 9. In the Book of Enoch the throne of God is described as like a throne of alabaster. The Judge here is not, as generally in the New Testament (St. John v. 22), Jesus Christ, but God in the fullness of His Being. The reason for this is probably that the judgment here is not the judgment of Christians, as such, but of the non-Christian world. The Christian world has already been judged (St. John v. 24; Rom. viii. 1) in the Person of its Head, and found guiltless through His perfect obedience. When the Divine Judge appears the existing order vanishes (St. Mark xiii. 31; 2 St. Peter iii. 10). The old creation has run its course, and must die that it may rise again into new and permanent life. The stage is cleared for a new creative act. But in this new creation there is no place for sin, and the citizens of this new city must prove their right to enter.

The General Resurrection

The writer is not describing a bodily resurrection (though perhaps that is implied), but a return to conscious life of those who have been waiting in the place of departed spirits (Hades) or in the sea. There seems to have been an idea in the ancient world that those drowned at sea did not go down to Hades, but wandered about in the waters. Hence the importance attached to burial. The writer of the Apocalypse also regarded the sea as a world of tumult and chaos outside ordered human life (ch. xiii. 1). Some commentators suggest that the reference is specially to those who perished in the great Deluge (cp. 1 St. Peter iii. 20). The vast majority of the great company would consist of those who had died before the Christian era. Those who had received the mark of the beast have already been judged, and those who are in Christ have been gathered into His Kingdom.

The Last Judgment

All social distinctions vanish when the dead stand before God—"the great and the small" stand side by side. They stand not before the Son of Man as His followers (St. Luke xxi. 36), but before their Creator. The idea of the books of memory open before God appears in Dan. vii. 10, and in some of the Jewish apocalypses ("the books will be opened in which are written the sins of all those who have sinned"—Apoc., Baruch xxiv. 1). See St. Augustine's "Confessions" for the mysterious power of memory. The heathen are judged "according to their works" (Rom. ii. 14, 15). At God's judgment-bar there is no arbitrary

condemnation, but the strict justice of perfect righteousness. Every man is confronted with his own record, and measured by the standard of his own opportunity. There is another book—the Book of Life (ch. iii. 5; xiii. 8). (Cp. Enoch xlvii. 3: "The books of the living were opened before Him.") The Divine predestination "willeth not the death of a sinner," but a name may be "blotted out of the Book of Life" (ch. iii. 5).

Death and Hades, the jailor and the prison, are cast together into the lake of fire to utter and eternal destruction. Hence the lake of fire is defined as the "second death." The words that follow are very terrible. They are probably suggested by the Jewish idea of Gehenna (St. Mark ix. 33; cp. Isa. lxvi. 24; Dan. xii. 2); which was itself suggested by the use of the Valley of Hinnom as a refuse-destructor for the city of Jerusalem, where fires were kept burning to consume the rubbish of the city. The symbol, therefore, conveys the idea of destruction rather than of everlasting torment. To what reality it corresponds we do not know. Many Christians cherish the hope—

> "That nothing walks with aimless feet;
> That not one life shall be destroyed,
> Or cast as rubbish to the void,
> When God hath made His pile complete."

Yet we dare not shut our eyes to the awful possibility involved in the fact of our human power of choice, that a man may choose death rather than life. Our only sure confidence is in the assurance that the Judge of all the earth will do right.

XLIV.—THE NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

(xxi. 1)

THE keynote of the Apocalypse is "the restoration of all things" (Acts iii. 21), the recreation of the world "from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Then, in the first act of the drama of human history, the serpent, the woman and the man by their disobedience bring disaster on creation. In the Apocalypse the serpent has grown into a great dragon, and there are two women—the bride of Christ waiting in the wilderness for the hour of deliverance, and the harlot-woman enjoying her brief triumph till the hour of her doom; and two men, the "Second Adam," the "Lord from Heaven" (1 Cor. xv. 45), and the Antichrist, of whom the two beasts are the symbols. The final victory of Christ is now followed by the promised restoration (Isa. lxv. 17; lxvi. 22).

The New Heaven

Heaven is used in this book (1) for the upper air, the "firmament" where dwell spirits good and evil (ch. ix. 1; xii. 1; vi. 14; and probably xii. 7); and (2) for the dwelling-place of God, where the great multitude of the redeemed stand before the throne. It is in the first sense that the word is used here; the dwelling-place of God needs no renewal, but the created universe was "made subject to vanity," and must be made anew by fire as of old the earth was made anew from the waters of the flood (2 St.

Peter iii. 7). The eternal world is not the mere prolongation of existing conditions. As the "body of our humiliation" must die that the spiritual body may be born, so the universe dies to sin that it may rise again unto righteousness. Of the two words for "new" (*neos*, absolutely new; and *kainos*, fresh, renewed) the latter is used here. The old creation is not wasted, it is transformed. Cp. the new covenant (St. Matt. xxvi. 28), the new commandment (St. John xiii. 34), the new creation (2 Cor. v. 17; Gal. vi. 15).

The New Earth

The physical earth, like the physical body, is subject to the law of decay and death. It may last a million years, but not for ever. But all in it that has spiritual value is imperishable. If there were no new earth in the vision of the seer the human race would seem to have ceased to be human. But the Incarnation shows that the purpose of God is not to turn men into angels, but to make them perfect men, made one with the Perfect Man (Eph. iv. 13). Man was made "to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." Imagination cannot picture an earth delivered from the limitations of time and decay (1 Cor. ii. 9), but we know that destruction is not the ultimate purpose of God. The earth we know, with its beauty and wonder, is the sacramental expression of the spiritual home of redeemed humanity. As the broken bread becomes the Body of Christ, so the broken world becomes the "visible garment of God." It is a false spirituality that fails to recognize the spiritual significance of material things.

No More Sea

"The sea is no more." To the Jewish people the sea was the symbol of mystery and separation (Psalm lxxvii. 19). They were not a seafaring people like the Phœnicians, or the Greeks—"the gay, light-hearted masters of the waves." To them an earth without a sea was an earth in which they could feel at home, where the fellowship of nations was no longer hindered by danger. The drying up of the sea was, to the prophets, a symbol of restored fellowship among the nations (Isa. xi. 15; li. 10; Psalm lxxiv. 15). But the sea also symbolised the rebellious power that set itself up against God (Psalm lxv. 7; xciii. 3). In the renewed earth there shall be no tempestuous defiance of the will of God; no sea out of which the wild beast of secular imperialism could rise (ch. xiii. 1). Again, the sea is a symbol of restlessness (Isa. lvii. 20), the unsatisfied longing of men and nations that will not let them rest. In the new earth the peace of God shall keep the hearts and minds of His children, and human life shall be at rest in perfect fellowship with Him.

On the land man could plant his home and build his cities and reap his harvests; on the sea he felt himself the sport of forces that he could not control; often the helpless victim of their apparent malevolence. So the new earth, where the sea is no more, expresses the idea of security and good will.

The disappearance of the sea is foretold in other apocalyptic writings—*e.g. The Assumption of Moses*, x. 6: "The sea will return into the abyss and the fulness of waters will fail"; and *Orac. Sibyll.* "In the last age the sea shall be dry."

XLV.—THE CITY OF GOD

(xxi. 2)

THE new man and the new earth are a restoration of the first creation, but the age-long education of humanity would be lost by a mere return to the childhood of the world. The new man must be a citizen. The city is the symbol of the social life of civilised mankind, the effort of men to realise the fellowship for which they were made. So the consecration of the city is the final theme of the seer's vision. The writer takes up and expands the phrase of ch. iii. 12. The details of the picture will require consideration presently. Let us consider first the general idea of the City of God.

The Jewish Idea of the City

To prophets and psalmists Jerusalem was the centre and symbol of the theocratic idea—the "city of the Great King" (Psalm xlviii. 2). To be born a citizen of the city was the highest good (Psalm lxxxvii. 5). The prophets looked forward to a time when Jerusalem would become the capital of the world-wide Kingdom of God (Isa. liv.; Ezek. xl.; etc.). "The Jewish ideal was essentially universal because it was the embodiment of the One Divine will." Yet it was also national in that it conceived of the new social order as an extension of the Jewish religious society. The Jew constituted the aristocracy of the ideal city; the idea of the admission of the Gentile world to equal citizenship was hardly present in Hebrew thought. It is this that St. Paul regards as the new revelation, not made known in other ages (Eph. iii. 6).

The Greek Idea of the City

The Jewish idea of the city began with God; the Greek idea began with man. The city was the expression of the social and political instinct of humanity. In it man realised himself in the atmosphere of freedom and self-government. Not to be a citizen was to be less than a full man. Though a noble it was a limited ideal, for it recognised no rights of man as man. The slave and the barbarian existed to minister to the "good life" of the citizen. When Stoic philosophy took over the Greek idea of the city, it added (or perhaps borrowed from Jewish sources) the conception of universality. Human cities are "copies in miniature of the universal city." "Man," says Marcus Aurelius, "is a citizen of that sublimest city of which all other cities are houses."

The Christian Idea of the City

Older Hebrew thought regarded man not as a citizen but as a stranger and sojourner on earth (Psalm xxxix. 12; Heb. xi. 13), looking for the true social life in the Divine City beyond. "The soul of the wise accounts in very truth heaven as its fatherland, and earth as a strange country" (Philo). This idea of detachment was taken over by Christian thought (1 St. Peter i. 1; see the well-known passage in the Epistle to Diognetus, ch. v). "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. iii. 20). The true social life of men cannot find expression in a world where the will of God is imperfectly done. In that heavenly city we are "no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God" (Eph. ii. 19). The

Christian man must be a good citizen of his earthly city (Rom. xiii. 7; 1 St. Peter ii. 13), but he must never forget that he is a stranger and a pilgrim (1 St. Peter ii. 11).

St. Paul describes the new Jerusalem as already existing in heaven, in contrast with the Jerusalem on earth, which is in bondage with her children (Gal. iv. 25). So in the Apocalypse the new Jerusalem is seen coming down from God out of heaven (Heb. xii. 22). It is not built up by human effort, but bestowed by divine grace, like every good gift (St. James i. 17).

The Holy City is also "a bride adorned for her husband." Humanity is redeemed, not merely that it may live a true social life, but that it may find its goal in union with God, and so fulfil the purpose of the Incarnation. No picture of the ideal social order can be other than incomplete if it fails to recognise this as the secret of its permanence and gladness. This is why the attempts of men—from Plato to William Morris and Mr. Wells—to describe the ideal commonwealth leave us unsatisfied. The fellowship of man with man is a means to an end, and the end is the fellowship of the whole human family, conscious at last of its brotherhood, with the Christ who is both human and Divine. Unless the King have pleasure in her beauty, its ultimate purpose fails. The glory and the gladness vanish from our Utopias when we forget that man's chief end is to glorify God.

(Many of the ideas in this "study" are derived from Dr. Westcott's note on Heb. xi. 10 in his Commentary on the Epistle.)

XLVI.—A PROCLAMATION AND A PROMISE

(xxi. 3–8)

AS on former occasions (ch. xvi. 16; xix. 5) the meaning of what he has seen is explained to the seer by a great voice out of the throne, and then God Himself is represented as speaking for the first time in this book; first in general terms, and then directly to the writer.

The Proclamation

The words of the proclamation announce the fulfilment of various Old Testament predictions (see Exod. xxxvii. 27; Lev. xxvii. 11; Jer. xxxi. 33). The Epistle to the Hebrews treats of the tabernacle as a type of the better and more perfect tabernacle yet to be established among men (Heb. viii. 2; ix. 11). The tabernacle represented a more intimate fellowship of God with His people than the more splendid temple that had not shared their pilgrim life. While they lived in tents as pilgrims and strangers God's tent had shared their wanderings. It expressed dimly and imperfectly the truth revealed in its fulness in the Incarnation (St. Matt. i. 23). That men might share the life of God, God Himself shared the life of men. There is one significant change. For "they shall be His people" the writer says "they shall be His peoples"—the nations are now to share the promise given originally to the Hebrew people. The words that follow are from Isaiah (xxv. 8; li. 11). Tears, death, sorrow and pain have no place in a world where humanity dwells in the presence of God (ch. vii. 17). "The first things are passed away" for all men, as they

had already passed away for the individual Christian (2 Cor. v. 17).

Then the seer hears God Himself speaking. The life of God is the perpetual renewal of creation (Isa. xliii. 18). The renewal of all things is represented not merely as an act of God, but as an inevitable outcome of His everpresent life. In an eternal present things cannot grow old, and eternal life is not the mere perpetuation of existence, but the constant renewal of the life of man by the inflow of the life of God.

The voice that had already spoken now charges the seer to put on record the solemn words that he has heard, for they are faithful and true (ch. iii. 14; xix. 11).

The Promise

God speaks again: "It has come to pass." The renewal of creation is now accomplished. The words used of Christ in ch. xxii. 13 are here used of the whole Divine Godhead (cp. ch. i. 8). In God all things have their beginning and end (Rom. xi. 36; Eph. iv. 6). Two promises follow—the first to the needy, the second to the victorious. For human life has two aspects—dependence and effort. The promise of the water of life recalls Isa. lv. 1; St. John iv. 10. The water of life springs like a fountain out of the throne of God as a free gift to all who are thirsty. The one qualification for sharing the divine grace is a consciousness of need. The promise is the echo of the invitation of Jesus: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (St. John vii. 37).

The second promise gathers into one the seven promises to "him that overcometh" at the

beginning of the book: "He that overcometh shall inherit these things" (not "all things"). The idea of the Christian inheritance is constantly present in the mind of the New Testament writers (1 St. Peter i. 4; Heb. xii. 17; Eph. iii. 6, etc.). We are "heirs through hope of His everlasting kingdom." But the fulness of the inheritance is not ours till we have proved ourselves worthy. It is "reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." We are heirs because we are sons (Rom. viii. 17; Gal. iv. 7), and therefore the promise includes the realisation of sonship (St. Luke xx. 36).

A Warning

"To him that overcometh"—but what of those who are vanquished? The dark catalogue of human failure recalls Rom. i. 21–32. It begins with cowardice and faithlessness. Then follow the characteristic sins of the heathen world—unnatural vice, murder, impurity, sorcery, idol-worship—from which the Christian could only be protected by courage and faith. Lastly "all liars," since the final result of sin is blindness to truth (Heb. iii. 13), which is the sin against the Holy Ghost, of which the pharisees were in danger when they accused our Lord of casting out demons by Beelzebub. Probably the writer is thinking specially of those who had lapsed into heathenism in times of persecution (Heb. iii. 12; iv. 11; vi. 8; x. 26). These, while they remain impenitent, have no place in the holy city. Is the dread sentence God's last word? To this question the warning gives no answer.

XLVII.—THE HOLY CITY, FROM WITHOUT

(xxi. 9–21)

THE seer has already seen from afar the Holy City, descending out of heaven; he now describes in detail its structure and life. The symbolism is literary rather than pictorial; all that the ancient world deemed highest in beauty and value is requisitioned to set forth the dazzling beauty of the City of God. All that art has laboured to express finds its realisation in the eternal world. The "great and high mountain" is probably a reference to Ezek. xl. 2 (cp. Isa. ii. 2). As our Lord was carried away to a high mountain to view all the kingdoms of the world, so the seer is carried to a high mountain to see the towering glories of the City of God.

The City

The "luminary" of the City—that from which its light is derived (see Gen. i. 14)—is like a clear translucent jasper. In ch. iv. 3 the divine glory is compared to a jasper stone, so here it is the glory of God that enlightens the City. Like the moon, it shines with reflected light, for its sun is the throne of God. The measurement of the City shows it as a colossal cube. The figure (12,000 furlongs) expresses the perfection of earth reconciled to heaven ($3 \times 4 \times 1000$). The cube was regarded as the most perfect geometrical form, so the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and in the temple (1 Kings vi. 20) was a cube. Perhaps the writer is thinking of the descriptions of ancient Babylon, which Herodotus describes as "four-square," each side being 120 furlongs. The New Jerusalem is a hundred times as large, for it is the dwelling-place of an innumerable multitude.

The Walls

Viewed from without, the first feature of the City to catch the eye is its gleaming walls. They are high enough (144 cubits—again the number twelve, multiplied by itself) for defence, but not so high as to hide the city within. They rest on twelve foundations—either twelve great foundation stones lying side by side, or twelve layers of stone one beneath the other. On them are inscribed the names of the twelve apostles (Eph. ii. 20), for the apostles were the rock on which Jesus Christ built His Church (St. Matt. xvi. 18). It is worth noticing that no special prominence is given to St. Peter, it is the whole company of the apostles that constitutes the foundation. The structure built on this foundation is of jasper, the symbol of crystalline purity, and the foundations sparkle with precious stones. Doubtless the writer had in mind the breastplate of the High Priest (Exod. xxviii. 17–20) and possibly Ezek. xxviii. 13. Various attempts have been made to find a special symbolism in each stone, but the purpose of the writer is rather to give a general picture of "glory and beauty." The apostles were a humble body of men, despised and persecuted by the world, but the foundation stones that bear their names in the heavenly city are decked with all manner of precious stones (1 St. Peter ii. 5).

The Gates

As in Ezek. xlviii., the city has twelve gateways, each allotted by name to one of the tribes of the spiritual Israel (cp. Num. ii). They face every way, that the servants of the King may go out eastward and northward and southward and westward on

their work of service. By each gate stands a guardian angel, that no evil thing may enter into the City (cp. Gen. iii. 24). Each gate is one vast pearl, far surpassing the "pearl of great price," for which the merchant would sell all that he hath (St. Matt. xiii. 46). Dr. Lee quotes a Jewish Talmudic writer: "God will place gems and pearls, thirty cubits square and hollowed out to the height of twenty cubits and to the breadth of ten cubits, in the gates of Jerusalem."

The Cubit of a Man

Verse 17 is an interesting illustration of the symbolism of the Apocalypse. The ordinary cubit in use among the Jews (Deut. iii. 11) was six handbreadths (spans), corresponding to the length of the forearm up to the elbow. But in Ezek. xl. 5 the angel uses a cubit measure with a span added—the six-span cubit that symbolised human imperfection being changed to the seven-span cubit that symbolised the perfection of the restored temple. So here the New Jerusalem is measured, not in the old cubits of human imperfection, but in the perfect seven-span cubit which has now become the cubit measure of angels and of men. In the heavenly city men will be "equal unto the angels" (St. Luke xx. 36), and their standard of measurement will be the perfect standard of heaven.

XLVIII.—THE HOLY CITY FROM WITHIN

(xxi. 21–27)

HAVING described the outward appearance of the New Jerusalem, the writer now carries us through the gates and tells us of the inner life of the

city. It is the picture of a perfect human society as it exists now in the mind and purpose of God, and shall exist hereafter as a realised ideal.

The Street of the City

Instead of the winding lines of an Eastern city, often choked with unsavoury refuse and blocked from sunlight by dark archways, the City of God has one broad highway running through it, the symbol of fellowship and security. It is paved with gold, pure like the sea of glass on which the redeemed stand in ch. iv. 6. That which constitutes the riches of earth becomes the pavement of the City of God; no longer a cause of discord, but the common possession of all.

The Sanctuary and its Light

There is no sanctuary, for the whole city is one vast Holy of Holies filled with the presence of God. The setting apart of specific holy places belongs to the imperfect human life in which the spiritual needs to be protected against the pressure of other interests. When human life is at once perfectly social and perfectly spiritual the city is itself a church. This thought is beautifully worked out in Professor Drummond's "City without a Church." The temple is not only the expression of perfect power ("the Lord God all-ruling"), but also of perfect love, expressed in sacrifice ("the Lamb"). The Old Testament and the New are united in one full revelation of the Divine. And as the Holy of Holies had no light but the shekinah of the divine glory, so the light of the city is the glory of God (Isa. lx. 20; Zech. ii. 5). "The lamb is the lamp thereof." Christ is the vehicle of the divine glory (Heb. i. 3)

through which it is communicated to the Church. In ch. i. there are several lamp-stands, but there is only one lamp (2 Cor. iv. 6)—only one human life that can contain (not merely reflect, 2 Cor. iii. 18) the whole glory of God (Col. i. 15 ; ii. 9).

Notice the two ways in which the thought of the relation of men to God is expressed—humanity as the great temple (Eph. ii. 21) in which Christ ministers as our High Priest ; and God as the great temple in which all the redeemed minister as priests (ch. i. 6 ; v. 10).

The Dwellers in the City

The New Jerusalem is not only the Church of the future, it is also the ideal Church as it has existed from all eternity in the mind and purpose of God. It has four special characteristics.

(1) The nations walk in the light of it (Isa. lx. 3). The Church is the light of the world (St. Matt. v. 14) because Christ, the true Light of the World, dwells in her. If her union with Him is broken, her light burns dim, and the nations are left in darkness. The old Jerusalem seemed like a candle held aloft in a world of darkness, but the new Jerusalem is like the sun that lightens the whole world.

(2) Kings and nations shall bring their glory and honour into it (Isa. lx. 5). All legitimate human authority is ultimately spiritual, and finds its true purpose in ministering to the spiritual life of humanity. The highest honour of a king is to be the servant of the Kingdom of God. The mention of nations suggests the thought that national life is a means whereby God enriches His Church, as each nation brings its particular gift of glory and honour into the City of God. The Englishman, the Russian, the

Chinaman, the African, has each his particular contribution to make to the fulness of the life of the Catholic Church.

(3) Its gates are always open to welcome all who come (Isa. lx. 11). And in the City of God it is always day, for service and rest are one. At evening the gates of an Eastern city were closed that men might sleep in safety. But the Church must never shut her gates.

There is at least one church in London that is open all day and all night so that there may always be a place where men can pray.

(4) Three classes of men are excluded: the unclean or unsanctified (literally "common," referring to the ceremonial uncleanness of the ancient law), the impure, and the untrue. The three words seem to suggest the evils that belong to the tripartite nature of men—the corruption of mind, body, and soul, for falsehood is impurity of soul. So we return again to the muster-roll of the citizens, the Lamb's Book of Life (Dan. xii. 1).

XLIX.—THE ETERNAL PARADISE

(xxii. 1–5)

THE last vision of the New Testament recalls the beginning of the Old. Paradise, the tree of life, the river, reappear. But the river now flows, not through a garden inhabited by two human beings, but through a city thronged with people and throbbing with the activities of service. The whole passage is based on Ezek. xlvii. 1–12.

The River of Life

"There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God" (Psalm xlvi. 4). Sparkling

like rock-crystal (cp. ch. iv. 6) the river flows forth perpetually from the throne of God—the throne seen first in heaven (ch. iv. 1), and now established in the city (verse 3). The meaning of the symbol is explained in St. John vii. 39. The Holy Spirit, "proceeding from the Father and the Son," flows as a refreshing and life-giving stream through the restored Paradise. In the old Paradise the river branches into four (the number of earth), but in the new and eternal Paradise it is one.

The Tree of Life

It is not certain whether the words "in the midst of the street of it" refer to the throne or to the river. The meaning probably is that the river flows through the midst of the street, with trees growing on either bank. The new Jerusalem is a garden city. The tree of life, no longer guarded by a flaming sword, now offers its fruit to all. The writer does not mean that it bears twelve different kinds of fruit, but that it bears fruit all the year round, so that the inhabitants of the city never need be hungry (ch. ii. 7). But in the Paradise of God there is provision not only for the hungry, but for those in need of healing, and as the fruit of the tree affords nourishment, its leaves give healing (Ezek. xlvii. 12), not only to the Jew, but to all the nations who share the life of the Holy City. Disease and hunger—the two ministers of death—have no place in the eternal Paradise, where there is no sin.

Some commentators think that "no more curse" means that nothing accursed by sin can enter the city, but it is more probable that the writer is thinking of the curse that blasted the first Paradise when the fellowship of God with man was broken.

The Service of Heaven

The curse laid on man through sin was that he should wrest his food from a reluctant earth (Gen. iii. 17), but now the curse is transformed into a blessing, and service becomes the secret of gladness and fellowship. The blessing of the redeemed is threefold :—

I. They "shall serve Him" (cp. St. Luke i. 74; ch. vii. 15). All service becomes transformed when we recognise that it is service for Him; it becomes dull and monotonous when it seems only service for ourselves. The word used here for service (*latreuo*) is used in the New Testament for religious service (Phil. iii. 3; Rom. i. 9; Heb. xii. 28)—the service that is also worship. We sometimes distinguish service and worship as two forms of Christian activity, but in the celestial city they are one.

II. They "shall see His face." To sinful men it was death to see the face of God (Judges vi. 22; xiii. 22; Exod. xxxiii. 20). "For now we see through a mirror darkly, but then face to face (1 Cor. xiii. 12). The pure in heart see God and find their full benediction in the perfect knowledge of "the King in His beauty" (Psalm xvii. 15). It is the lost vision of God towards which all the discipline of life is leading us; we need desire no other good beyond this, in which the angels rejoice (St. Matt. xviii. 10).

III. "His name shall be in their foreheads," marking them for ever as His (ch. iii. 12; vii. 3), as the Name of God was on the frontlet of the High Priest (Exod. xxviii. 36). With this picture of man restored to fellowship with God the Apocalypse ends. The verses that follow are an epilogue in which the

significance of the book is gathered up and interpreted. The full realisation of the threefold blessing of the eternal Paradise is not ours yet, but even here we may know something of the gladness of the service, something of the wonder of the vision, something of the security of the Name. For though we are "in heaviness for a season" the inheritance is ours, who are guarded by the power of God, through faith, unto a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time (1 St. Peter i. 4).

L.—THE ANGEL'S FAREWELL

(xxii. 6–13)

THE angel whose mission is announced in the prologue (ch. i. 1) has now fulfilled his commission, and becomes more directly the vehicle through whom our Lord Himself speaks His last message to the writer, so that it is not easy to say at what point his voice becomes silent and Jesus Himself speaks.

The Angelic Confirmation

Again the seer is reminded that the visions that he has seen are "faithful and true"—that is, the things of which they tell are real things, and the picture they give of them is a trustworthy picture. "The Lord God of the spirits of the prophets" is a striking phrase (cp. 1 Cor. xiv. 32; ch. xix. 10); it implies the claim of the writer to be the successor of the Old Testament prophets, whose work he has been called to complete. The nearness of the fulfilment of the visions is asserted in the thrice-repeated warning, "Behold, I come quickly." The early Church believed that the *Parousia*—the manifestation of Christ in glory—was destined to come

within the generation then living (see 1 Thess. iv. 17). The gradual fading of that hope shows itself in St. Paul's later Epistles, and in 2 St. Peter iii. 4. Yet for each individual it is still true that the end of time is near, and in the timeless world beyond, all human history may seem but a moment, for with God a thousand years is as one day (2 St. Peter iii. 8). The benediction of ch. i. 3 is now repeated in a shortened form; the readers have read and heard; it remains for them to "keep the sayings."

The Angelic Rebuke

As in ch. xix. 10 the seer offers to his angel-guide before he departs the worship that he refuses to accept. Worship is due to God alone; no intermediate being must be interposed between the soul and its Maker. The saints, like the angel, would, if we could hear them, repudiate human adoration. The claim of the angel to be "a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets," and with all the faithful, recalls the beautiful words of our collect, "Who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order." In God's great hierarchy of service there is a place for us all, and in the fellowship of service we are one with the "innumerable company of angels" (Heb. i. 14; xii. 22).

Every true messenger of God, like St. John the Baptist (St. John iii. 30) must point men away from himself to the Master whom he serves (1 Cor. iii. 7).

The Angelic Warning

Daniel is told to "seal" and "shut up" the revelations given to him, because the time of their fulfilment is still far off (Dan. viii. 26; xii. 4); but

here the seer is reminded that the revelations given to him are in trust for the whole Church, because the end is near. The Christian Gospel is not a secret doctrine for an elect few, but a universal message to be carried into all the world and preached to every creature (St. Mark xvi. 15).

Then there is the message to the world. Verse 11 is ironical; it means "choose your side in the great struggle; be wholehearted in the service to which you give yourself." It will be no excuse for a man that he was only half-hearted in the service of evil.

> "Let a man contend to the uttermost
> For his life's set prize, be it what it will."

Perhaps, also, it means that as the end draws nearer the alternatives of good and evil will become clearer and men will be compelled to choose on which side they will stand; the unrighteous and the impure will become more reckless in their wickedness, and the righteous and holy will appear more evidently in their true character. The two words seem to suggest human life in two aspects—unrighteousness being a wrong attitude towards God, and filthiness a wrong attitude towards man. The one is the inevitable outcome of the other (Rom. i. 18, 24).

Finally, there is a last warning of the inevitable judgment. It is not a judgment on isolated actions, but on the whole product of each life—its "work" (cp. 1 St. Peter i. 17; 1 Cor. iii. 13). The word translated "reward" means literally wages (Acts i. 18; St. Matt. xx. 8)—not the wages that we have earned, but the wages that we have tried to earn; or, as a deeper truth, the wages that have been earned for us by the perfect obedience of Christ.

This final judgment closes the great chapter that opens with creation. As "the Word of God" is

the originator of creation (St. John i. 1 ; Heb. i. 2), so it is to Him that creation returns at the last that He may gather the harvest of all the ages of human history into the garner of God. He is " Alpha and Omega " (ch. i. 8), " the beginning and the end " (ch. xxi. 6), " the first and the last " (Isa. xli. 4).

LI.—LAST WORDS

(xxii. 14–21)

IN these closing verses the speaker is sometimes the Lord Jesus ; sometimes the writer himself. The two last words of the writer to his readers are (1) the message is true, and (2) the Lord is coming soon.

The Last Benediction

Notice the seven benedictions in this book : Blessed is he that readeth (i. 3) ; blessed are the dead that die in the Lord (xiv. 13) ; blessed is he that watcheth (xvi. 15) ; blessed are they which are called (xix. 9) ; blessed is he that hath part in the first resurrection (xx. 6) ; blessed is he that keepeth the sayings (xxii. 7) ; blessed are they that do his commandments (or " that wash their robes " ; it is uncertain which is the right reading, xxii. 14). They fall into two groups : the blessedness conferred—gladness (xix. 9), rest (xiv. 13), deliverance (xx. 6) ; and the blessedness attained—reading, watching, keeping, doing (or cleansing).

There is no place in the Holy City for the scavenger-dogs that roam through Eastern cities. Perhaps the writer has in mind Psalm lix. 6. All that is impure is for ever debarred from entry.

The Last Attestation

The angelic revelation is here attested by the Lord Himself. In Him the historic past finds its fulfilment, and in Him the new day of God dawns on the world. "The Root of David" (cp. ch. v. 5) goes back to Isa. xi. 1, 10. He is the Lord of David, and his Son (St. Matt. xxii. 45) the beginning and the consummation of theocratic kingship. "The bright and morning star" (ch. ii. 28) recalls St. Luke i. 78; 2 St. Peter i. 19. The morning star is the herald of a day that has no end—the eternal day of God. The full day has not yet dawned, but the morning star still shines as the symbol of hope.

It is not clear whether the speaker of the warning of verses 18–19 is Jesus or the writer. The form is probably suggested by Deut. iv. 2; xii. 32. "It was not uncommon for writers to protect their works by adding a solemn adjuration to the scribes to correct the copies carefully, and in no case to mutilate or interpolate the original" (Swete). But the writer has in view not accidental errors, but deliberate falsification. The Church is "a witness and keeper of Holy Writ"; her office is to preserve the truth from corruption. The scholars who have laboured to restore the true text of the Bible have been engaged in a work for which the Church is ultimately responsible.

A Call and an Invitation

To the promise of Jesus, "I come quickly," there is a threefold response. The prophetic spirit (cp. verse 6) and the whole Church join in the prayer, "Come." And all who hear the call are invited to add their intercession. Then, lastly, the writer

himself adds his prayer, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Has not the Church in these latter days lost the fervent longing of the early Church for the return of her Lord? Do we pray often enough or earnestly enough for His coming? Perhaps the bankruptcy of our human resources of good may lead us to recognise more clearly that the hope of the world is in the coming of its true King. Nothing would do more to detach the Church from compromise and worldliness than the reawakening of the impulse that replies to the promise, "I come," with the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus." But do we desire that He should come? Are we ready for His coming?

With the call is associated an invitation. If "he that heareth" is to join in the cry he must first stoop and drink of the healing waters that flow from the throne. "Let him that is athirst come, if he will, and take of the water of life freely" (Isa. lv. 1). Notice the two conditions—consciousness of need and willingness to receive. Then there is the personal act—"let him take"—for man is not a mere passive recipient of divine grace. So in our Communion office we say, "Draw near with faith and take." It is only when we have opened our lives to the Spirit of God that we learn to desire the coming of Jesus Christ. We must come unto Him before we can pray for His coming to the world.

The Apocalypse closes with a last benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints" (not "with you all"; the book is not written to one Church, but to all the Churches).

THE END

BOOKS

THE following books may be recommended for further study of the Book of Revelation :—

The Messages of the Apocalyptical Writers. F. C. PORTER, Ph.D., D.D. James Clarke & Co. ("The Messages of the Bible" Series.)

The Book of Revelation. W. MILLIGAN, D.D. Hodder and Stoughton. ("The Expositor's Bible.")

The Book of Revelation. Rev. W. H. SIMCOX, M.A. Cambridge University Press. ("The Cambridge Bible for Schools.")

Revelation. C. ANDERSON SCOTT. Dent. ("The Century Bible.")

The Letters to the Seven Churches. W. M. RAMSAY, D.C.L., Litt.D. Hodder & Stoughton.

The Apocalypse of St. John. H. B. SWETE, D.D. Macmillan & Co.

The best recent commentary on the Greek Text.

The following Apocalyptic Texts are published, in an English translation, by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge :—

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